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## The Twentieth Century KU Klux Klan in Morehouse Parish, Louisiana.

Alton Earl Ingram

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**THE TWENTIETH CENTURY KU KLUX KLAN  
IN MOREHOUSE PARISH, LOUISIANA**

**A Thesis**

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts**

**in**

**The Department of History**



**by  
Alton Earl Ingram  
B.A., Northeast Louisiana State College, 1958  
August, 1961**

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## ABSTRACT

The twentieth century Ku Klux Klan in Morehouse Parish, Louisiana, was part of a movement in the United States which became widespread during the third decade of this century. In 1921 and 1922, the years of the establishment and growth of the Morehouse Klan, there occurred in that parish a wave of violence and intimidation attributed to the Klan. On August 24, 1922, five citizens of the parish were kidnapped by a mob of black-robed men. One of the victims was released unharmed, two were released after being severely beaten, and two were murdered and their bodies concealed for approximately four months.

Following the failure of the Morehouse Parish grand jury to bring indictments in the case, the governor of Louisiana ordered an open hearing into the case which began on January 3, 1923. At the conclusion of the state's investigation, the Morehouse Parish grand jury again failed to return indictments. Although the guilty parties were never prosecuted, the Ku Klux Klan in Morehouse Parish was destroyed because of this incident, and the effect of the investigation was felt throughout the state and nation.

In the preparation of this manuscript, pertinent Louisiana and United States government publications were utilized. In addition, interviews were conducted with persons involved in the incident. Various Louisiana newspapers were used extensively because of the disappearance of the transcript of the open hearing from the Morehouse

Parish Courthouse. These and other sources were examined in an attempt to present an accurate account of the Forehouse murders and their effect on the twentieth century Klan movement.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Ku Klux Klan in the United States during the twentieth century had little in common with its historical predecessor of the same name. According to its organizer and first Imperial Wizard, William Joseph Simmons:

"The present Klan is a memorial to the original organization, the story of whose value has never been told, and the value of whose activities to the American nation have never been appreciated. . . . The name of the old Klan has been taken by the new as a heritage. The regalia and insignia of the old have been adopted by the new. . . . Beyond this point the connection and similarity between the two organizations do not exist."<sup>1</sup>

Without lengthy comment on Wizard Simmons' evaluation of the old Klan, one might add that at best it was an extralegal attempt by a defeated section of this nation to correct the evils of a period referred to as the Reconstruction of the Southern states which followed an unsuccessful attempt to secede from the Union. Earlier writers tended to glorify the actions of the first Klan, but more recently historians have questioned the success of the movement.

The modern Klan had an inauspicious beginning in 1915 in Atlanta, Georgia. William Joseph Simmons, its organizer, has been described as

". . . tall, thin-lipped, bespectacled southerner [who] with his rather tense and emotional expression might

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<sup>1</sup>William Joseph Simmons, The Klan Unmasked (Atlanta: William E. Thompson Publishing Co., 1924), 27-28.

[be classified] as a revivalist preacher or a political 'spellbinder' of the familiar Southern type. As a matter of fact he has been a preacher, a travelling salesman, a promoter of Fraternal organizations, and a professor of Southern history in a Southern institution. The man reflects his background in thought and act, for he fairly exudes uncritical sentimentalism of the conventional type. Emperor Simmons is a dreamer, even a mystic, with considerable oratorical power. His habits of thought are those of the emotional preacher of limited education accustomed to appealing to the feelings and the imagination rather than to reason. He is, above all, keenly, almost intuitively, alert to the feelings of the average man. Reading his public utterances, one gets the impression of a man whose temperament and training are inimical to strict intellectual integrity. One feels that without any conscious departure from the truth he could very easily convince himself, under the pressure of the immediate situation, that the particular point he wished to make was the whole truth and nothing but the truth. . . . He does possess, however, a singular ability to insinuate himself into the sympathies of the average man of the middle class and to play upon his likes and dislikes. In this respect Simmons has served as the model of all Klan leaders and organizers. This is perhaps his most important contribution to the Klan movement."<sup>2</sup>

The first few years of the Klan movement under the leadership of "Emperor" Simmons were uneventful and from all outward appearances it looked as though its fate would be that of many other obscure fraternal organizations of that period. It was at this point (June, 1920) that Simmons enlisted the aid of two persons, Edward Young Clarke and Mrs. Elizabeth Tyler, and thus began the phenomenal expansion of the Klan. Clarke and Tyler were propagandists by profession and had been connected for years with the Southern Publicity Association, where they successfully conducted fund-raising drives

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<sup>2</sup>John Moffatt Mecklin, The Ku Klux Klan: a study of the American Mind (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1924), 17-18.

for such organizations as the Anti-Saloon League, the Roosevelt Memorial Fund, and Near-East Relief. The results of the stimulus provided by the publicity agents were immediately apparent as in less than one-and-one-half years Klan membership had grown from four or five thousand members centered in and around Atlanta to more than one hundred thousand members spread throughout the entire United States.<sup>3</sup>

### Klan Organization

The formal organization of the Klan was military in character and the Imperial Wizard was the unquestioned leader, as was evidenced in a contract signed by Simmons and Clarke which stated, "It is agreed that in all things the second party [Clarke] shall be subordinate to the said Imperial Wizard (President), and shall attempt no plans or methods of work without the consent or approval of the said Imperial Wizard."<sup>4</sup> The organization was designed so as to insure personal loyalty to Simmons by requiring all officers to take an oath in which they swore:

"I . . . do freely and voluntarily promise, pledge and fully guarantee a lofty respect, wholehearted loyalty and unwavering devotion at all times and under all circumstances and conditions from this day and date forward to William Joseph Simmons as Imperial Wizard and Emperor of the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>4</sup>Henry P. Fry, The Modern Ku Klux Klan (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1922), 32.

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I shall work in all respects in perfect harmony with him and under his authority and directions."<sup>5</sup>

Then in Section I of the Klan Oath, obedience was sworn to Simmons by all members who were required to "render at all times loyal respect and steadfast support to the Imperial Authority of same [Ku Klux Klan]; And . . . heartily heed all official mandates, decrees, edicts, rulings, and instructions of the Imperial Wizard thereof."<sup>6</sup>

The one exception to the autocratic character of the Klan is found in Section VII of the Klan's petition for organization presented to the Superior Court of Fulton County, Georgia. The petitioners stipulated that the Imperial Wizard's powers be restricted to the extent that a two-thirds majority of delegates chosen from local chapters could exercise the power of veto over Simmons' official acts.<sup>7</sup> It should be pointed out, however, that neither the petition nor the secret documents of the Klan provided the framework for calling either regular or special conventions for the purpose of determining policy. The first convention of this nature was not held until November, 1922, which leads to the conclusion that few, if any, restrictions were placed on "Emperor" Simmons during the formative years of the Klan.

The structure of the Ku Klux Klan was that of a rigid hierarchy. The supreme governing body of the Klan was the Imperial Klonvocation,

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 68-70.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 32.

a legislative group composed of delegates chosen by the various states. The Imperial Wizard, the chief administrative officer, was responsible only to this Klonvocation. This restriction applied in theory rather than in fact for, as has been pointed out, the legislative body was not convened during the first seven years of the Klan's existence. The Imperial Kleagle ranked directly below the Imperial Wizard and directed the promotional aspects of the organization. The United States was divided into eight Domains each of which was composed of an indeterminate number of states, and each state, known as a Realm, was further subdivided into more workable units usually corresponding with the state's political subdivisions which were designated numerically. Each Domain was headed by a Grand Goblin and each Realm, by a King Kleagle. The field organizers within each Realm were known as Kleagles.<sup>8</sup> The title given to the leader of each county unit of the Ku Klux Klan was Exalted Cyclops and under his direct control were the Klanmen, the Citizens of the Invisible Empire.

### Finances

One of the major contemporary criticisms of the Klan was that it was designed to function primarily as a money-raising scheme. Although this point is somewhat overemphasized by Klan critics, there is adequate evidence to justify a brief look at the financial aspects of the Klan movement.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 44-47.



The bulk of Klan revenue came from the ten dollar donation required of each new member. According to the contract between Clarke and Simmons, Clarke was to receive eight dollars per charter member for every chapter he organized. In addition, he was to receive two dollars for each member who joined these chapters during the first six months of their existence.<sup>9</sup> Following this initial six month period the ten dollar donations were dispersed as follows: The local solicitor or Kleagle retained four dollars and sent the remainder of the donation to the State Sales Manager or King Kleagle; the King Kleagle kept one dollar and sent the remaining five dollars to the District Salesman or Grand Goblin; the Grand Goblin received fifty cents and the balance of four dollars and fifty cents was sent to Atlanta.<sup>10</sup>

There were also various enterprises which illustrate the vast commercial possibilities of the Klan. The three principal promoters, William J. Simmons, Edward Y. Clarke, and Mrs. Elizabeth Tyler, were engaged in several closely related ventures. These included the Gates City Manufacturing Company, a corporation organized under Georgia law to manufacture lodge regalia, etc.; the Searchlight Publishing Company which published a weekly newspaper recognized as the official organ of the Klan; and Lanier University of which William J. Simmons was President. Another corporation, The Clarke Realty

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>10</sup>Macklin, op. cit., 6-10.

Company, was formed by E. Y. Clarke and Mrs. Elizabeth Tyler.<sup>11</sup> The Klan did not sell the official robes to its members. They were rented for six dollars and fifty cents per robe, and each member was required to return the robe to the head of his Klan upon leaving the organization. Orders for the robes were taken and sent to the Imperial Wizard who in turn forwarded the orders to the Gates City Manufacturing Company of Atlanta, Georgia.<sup>12</sup>

In Article II of the original petition for organization the Klan provided that "there shall be no capital stock or profit or gain to the members." However, in the summer of 1921, the Klan purchased the colonial home of H. M. Durant about five miles from Atlanta for the approximate cost of seventy-five thousand dollars and it was presented as a gift to the Imperial Wizard, William Joseph Simmons.<sup>13</sup>

Whatever the importance of financial gain for these few organizers and promoters, this alone can not possibly explain the phenomenal growth of the Klan which eventually claimed several million members.

#### Purpose and Aims of the Klan

It is difficult to understand the purpose and goals of the Klan by examination of its official documents. In fact, for several years the Klan seemed to grow and prosper with no established program.

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<sup>11</sup>Fry, op. cit., 31-32.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 42.

In 1923, the newly selected Imperial Wizard, Dr. H. W. Evans, substantiated this in his remark to a convention of Klan leaders in North Carolina, "I have been listening and watching in order to be able to interpret to you a real program for the Klan."<sup>14</sup> Further evidence that the Klan began with no formal program is illustrated in a statement made by an Illinois Klan leader in an address to fellow Klansmen:

"We must all realize . . . that the abnormal growth of the organization, is responsible, in a measure, for the lack of understanding by some of the real principles. We must now turn to the task of educating the members that the Ku Klux Klan is a modern institution, organized primarily for service to our country."<sup>15</sup>

It would be accurate to say that the Klan began with no aims and later developed into the organization with which we are familiar.

Membership in the Klan was restricted to native-born white male Protestants, and the program that the Klan developed was a combination of the likes, dislikes, fears, and prejudices of this element in American society. At this period the American nation was emerging from the great World War and its citizens had been conditioned to stories of poison gas and war atrocities which, combined with propaganda concerning Bolshevik designs upon American institutions, contributed to a growing suspicion of anything foreign. The reaction of a majority of the American people to the issue of the League of

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<sup>14</sup>W. Evans, "Where Do We Go From Here," Papers Read at the Meeting of Grand Dragons, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan at their first Annual Meeting at Ashley, North Carolina, July, 1923 (Atlanta, 1923), 7 (hereinafter cited as Klan Papers).

<sup>15</sup>Great Titan of the Realm of Illinois, "How To Educate A Klansman To Fill His Obligation," Klan Papers, 64-65.

Nations in the election of 1920 would tend to indicate a desire to withdraw from further foreign involvement and a return to an America with a post-war political orientation.<sup>16</sup>

### Anti-Foreign

The Ku Klux Klan in the United States took as a major objective the solution of the immigration problem and also considered a program to minimize the influence of the foreign-born already residing in the United States. This is best shown in a statement made by the Grand Dragon of South Carolina in a speech to fellow leaders of the Klan:

"The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan should adopt a definite policy and program for combatting the influence of individuals or organizations who are endeavoring to open the gates of our ports for the admission of aliens. Therefore, the Imperial Wizard should appoint an Imperial Immigration and Naturalization Commission to make a thorough study and outline a program. Such a Commission should make an analysis of the Immigration and Naturalization question, and submit a report to the Imperial Wizard, for his approval, with a definite policy to handle this complex question."<sup>17</sup>

This Klan leader further suggested what the Klan policy should be:

"In my opinion a law should be enacted restricting immigration to the United States for at least ten years, while we take an inventory of the human assets and liabilities within our borders, do a bit of house cleaning and set our domestic affairs in better order."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Mecklin, op. cit., 121-123.

<sup>17</sup>Grand Dragon of South Carolina, "The Regulation of Immigration," Klan Papers, 73.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 70.

The cause of this anti-foreign feeling among Klan leaders may be examined from cultural, economic, and political standpoints. The first fear was that the foreigners would destroy the so-called American culture. Evidently little attention was given to the fact that the very thing to be preserved, the American culture, was a product of the amalgamation of various cultural traits of previous immigrants. Certainly the United States has retained little of the culture of the true native inhabitants, the North American Indians. In order to prevent the possible destruction of the American culture the Klan suggested that it was necessary "that a law be enacted prohibiting the printing of any newspaper or magazine not printed in the English language, and to require all aliens within our borders to speak English within a limited period of time."<sup>19</sup>

A specific example of American culture believed to be jeopardized by foreigners was the traditional rural atmosphere of this nation. The fact that the majority of Americans lived in urban centers by 1920 allowed the predominantly rural membership of the Klan to attack not only foreigners in the large cities but the so-called evils of city life itself. "Emperor" Simmons emphasized this fact:

"The alien peoples have not been distributed over the vast area of our country, but have, for the most part, been congested in our great centers. . . . Because of their numbers, as well as their nationalistic tendencies, they organize themselves into separate communities and often breed hostility to American institutions.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

How natural that such foreign communities should spawn all forms of social and political vices."<sup>20</sup>

At another point Simmons went further in attacking urban culture:

"The city simply can not furnish the character-building elements which must needs go into the making of an American. Every American child should be born to a vast heritage. This heritage should include a fine healthy parentage, clean birth, gentle care, proper nourishment, and opportunity for play and education in the open country."<sup>21</sup>

An examination of the economic aspect of the anti-foreign feeling of the Klan makes the purpose very clear: "The policy of the Klan is to stop this stream of undesirables and thus prevent the glutting of the American labor market."<sup>22</sup> "Emperor" Simmons expanded this idea and justified it:

"We are told to-day (1920) that millions of workers in our great cities are unemployed. I reflect at once upon the figures which are placed before us. In round numbers we have, this winter, about six millions of unnaturalized foreign working people living in our cities, and almost exactly the same number of unemployed on our hands. What would they have us to do? Are six millions more to come to us and thus give us a total of twelve millions of unemployed? What would these people all do for a living? There are simply not enough jobs in the cities for them, and it seems evident that there will not be in our generation."<sup>23</sup>

A final consideration of the reason for Klan opposition to foreign immigration was the belief on the part of the Klan that these foreign-born would exert an undue amount of political influence

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<sup>20</sup>Simmons, op. cit., 55-56.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>22</sup>An Exalted Cyclops of the Order, "The Principles And Purposes Of The Knights Of The Ku Klux Klan," Klan Papers, 128.

<sup>23</sup>Simmons, op. cit., 123-124.

in this country. This would be accomplished in the following way:

"This immigrant element has been . . . used in our elections as a mass vote by those who exercise control over its votes through the political power of the Church."<sup>24</sup> At another point Simons declared that only native-born Americans should participate in politics:

"We believe that only one born on American soil, surrounded by American institutions, taught in American schools, harmonized from infancy with American ideas, can become fully conscious of what our peculiar democracy means and be adequately qualified for all the duties of citizenship in this republic."<sup>25</sup>

It should be remembered that this fear of alien interference in politics was not new in American history. The first political party in power in America, the Federalist, championed the idea of limiting political participation of the foreign-born by sponsoring the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798. This policy played an important role in destroying the Federalists as an effective element in American politics. Later parties profited by the experience of the Federalists and were hesitant to formally condemn the foreign-born as they realized that the alien of today would be the voting citizen of tomorrow.

### Anti-Negro

The Klan attitude toward the Negro is perhaps the easiest to evaluate. On this point there can be little question as the Klan in both official and unofficial statements left little to the imagination

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 74-75.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 54.

with regard to its position. Paul S. Etheridge summarized the Klan position toward the Negro in a paper entitled "An Interpretation Of The Constitution And Laws Of The Knights Of The Ku Klux Klan": "We are committed to a doctrine of a positive distinction between the races of mankind as decreed by the Creator, and pledged to an undying purpose to maintain white supremacy and to oppose any compromise thereof."<sup>26</sup> "Emperor" Simmons justified the official stand on white supremacy by pointing to the alleged inferiority of the Negro race:

"Why should the simple truth give offense to anybody? The Negro in Africa is a childish barbarian. Left to himself, he has never at any time or place evolved even the beginning of a civilization. Do what we may in the way of an education, the mind of the pure Negro, compared to the white, on the average does not get beyond the age of twelve years."<sup>27</sup>

It is accurate to say that the Klan advocated a policy of keeping the Negro subordinate to the white man in the social, economic, and political spheres. This policy merely reflected the attitude of the majority of Southern whites.

### Anti-Catholic

The idea that the Roman Catholics in America posed a threat to the American system was not new. The Know-Nothing Party, at its peak in 1856, had as one of its objectives the removal of Roman Catholics from a prominent place in American politics. Usually resentment against Catholics has been at a peak immediately following a large

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<sup>26</sup>Paul S. Etheridge, "An Interpretation Of The Constitution And Law Of The Knights Of The Ku Klux Klan," Klan Papers, 38.

<sup>27</sup>Simmons, op. cit., 156.



influx of Catholic immigrants into the United States. This was true in 1856 and in the early 1920's.

The two most important objections Protestant Americans had to Catholics were: (1) The allegiance every Catholic owed the Pope and (2) The practice of establishing parochial schools in order to educate Catholic youth. In 1923, the newly selected Imperial Wizard, Dr. H. W. Evans, expressed the Klan idea that a Catholic can not be a loyal American:

"The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan hold that if the doctrine of the Catholic Church is that the Pope is God's divinely appointed representative on earth, and has the right to control over states, that doctrine is dangerous to this or any other free country.

We believe this to be the real doctrine of the Roman Catholic, if he honestly believes the Pope to be God's divinely appointed agent over all the earth, over all governments and people on earth, would hold first allegiance to the Pope and then to America."<sup>28</sup>

Evans then stated that the Klan should "steadfastly oppose the political interference of Roman Catholic organizations in political matters in America."<sup>29</sup> The other basis of Klan criticism of Catholics was the Catholic practice of educating their youth in parochial schools. The Klan felt that the Church was using this method to prevent the adequate education in democratic practices which were deemed necessary for proper participation in a democratic form of government. Imperial Wizard Evans attacked the Catholic schools by remarking:

"We cannot allow any world-wide system of religious teaching, highly organized and entirely secret, to gain control of the free channels of government in America. The free public school system of America is

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<sup>28</sup>H. W. Evans, "The Attitude Of The Knights Of The Ku Klux Klan Toward The Roman Catholic Hierarchy," Klan Papers, 38.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 113.

the singular God-given instrument with which the forces of superstition, ignorance and fanaticism have been beaten to their knees; and any man or any sect, anywhere, who lends his voice, his money, or his influence to the suppression or hindrance of this great educational system is an enemy of this country and ought not to be permitted to preach a doctrine subversive of its principles."<sup>30</sup>

This example of the Klan attitude toward Roman Catholics was published as an official statement of the Klan and may be considered mild when compared to statements made by local leaders. An example of a more hostile attitude toward Catholics is found in a speech delivered to a large Klan gathering in Chattanooga, Tennessee: "The Knights of Columbus have 2,000 rifles stored in the Catholic church; they will before long march down Market Street armed with their rifles; and the Ku Klux Klan must organize and arm itself for the purpose of protecting the city from the designs of this murderous organization."<sup>31</sup> One wonders what the "design of this murderous organization" was. Could it perhaps have been to transfer the Vatican to Tennessee?

The Klan at all times realized the necessity of associating itself with the Protestant Churches of America. The Grand Dragon of the Realm of Oklahoma vividly emphasized this in a paper entitled "The Definition Of Klankraft And How To Disseminate It":

"But how can this be accomplished? [Dissemination of Klankraft] First: by making a supreme effort to interest all Protestant ministers who can qualify [among those who could not qualify were undoubtedly Negro ministers] in our organization, with the ultimate view of taking them into our order; second: by encouraging these

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 116.

<sup>31</sup>Fry, op. cit., 25.

ministers to deliver in the pulpit and in the Klavern, sermons which deal with the great principles of our order, ever standing ready to assist them in gathering necessary data to drive home their arguments, and in voicing our appreciation of their efforts by representation, financial and moral support in all their legitimate undertakings."<sup>32</sup>

This statement, more than any other, illustrates the extent to which the Klan would go in order to have its views brought to the attention of a community. It would be impossible to determine to what extent Protestant ministers included the doctrines of the Klan in their theology. Reverend Caleb A. Ripley, a Baptist minister of Atlanta, Georgia, expressed Klan ideals in the following statement: "I am an Anglo-Saxon white man, so ordained by the hand and will of God and so constituted and trained that I cannot conscientiously take either my politics or religion from some secluded ass on the other side of the world."<sup>33</sup> A statement of this type presents the question: Would Reverend Ripley be willing to take his "politics or religion" from a white-robed ass on this side of the world?

### Anti-Jewish

The last important minority group attacked by the Klan was the Jewish population of the United States. Once more an issue was presented, anti-Semitism, which did not originate in the Klan but which was adopted by that organization. The Klan feeling of anti-Semitism

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<sup>32</sup>Grand Dragon of the Realm of Oklahoma, "The Definition of Klankraft and How To Disseminate It," Klan Papers, 46-47.

<sup>33</sup>Fry, op. cit., 119-120.

stemmed from religious, economic, and cultural factors. Imperial Wizard Evans pointed to the nonconformity of the Jewish religion, and optimistically spoke of converting the Jews to Christianity:

"Give them [the Jews] the idea of Christian civilization--give them the high tide of Christian civilization and they will absorb Jesus Christ--they will absorb Christ's doctrine because it has won every human on earth except the Jew. If you will only do that you will not only benefit those people themselves who stand out as people without a flag or a country, but the whole world will be benefited."<sup>34</sup>

At another point Dr. Evans assailed the Jews as an economic liability to the United States:

"The Jew has engaged in the small trades in America. His economic value to society is that of a middle-man. There is no enterprise or industry of the inventive, creative, or initiative sort that the Jew can claim as his distinctive contribution to the public welfare in America. He has not, by skill or artisan, afforded anything to American idealism, or by vision of artist added anything to American construction. He has given American people no impulsion to simpler and nobler life. The Jew has not increased the sum of American wealth."<sup>35</sup>

Dr. Evans continued by combining his criticism of the Jews with another Klan doctrine, the evil of the city:

"But nearly all the Jews in this country live in the large cities. They are not generally distributed over the vast area of our common country. This violates a fundamental law of our social life. [A fundamental law of the Ku Klux Klan] 'The city is a cancer on the body politic,' and 'an illustration of the failure of American democracy.' The point however is just this: The Jew came to America in considerable numbers only after the great American Republic was established, then for

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<sup>34</sup>Evans, "Where Do We Go From Here," Klan Papers, 12-13.

<sup>35</sup>H. W. Evans, "The Attitude Of The Knights Of The Ku Klux Klan Toward The Jew," Klan Papers, 121.

the purpose of taking asylum under the towers of Democratic Government. He did nothing to wrest human rights from despotic power, or to found the institutions of human liberty."<sup>36</sup>

The preceding is a summary of the attitude of the Klan toward four large minority groups in American society; the foreign-born, the Negro, the Roman Catholic, and the Jew. By no means did the Klan program stop here. The Grand Dragon of South Carolina explained how the Klan intended to give aid to problems of a more localized nature: "The Japanese question is another great menace that confronts the American people today. And the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan can do no greater service than to take up the fight with those loyal citizens of California, in their effort to prevent their state from becoming a little Japan."<sup>37</sup> Thus it is obvious that the Klan, if effectively used, could concentrate the influence of its national membership upon the desires of any local organization.

The majority of the information on the principles and purpose of the Klan was taken from a book made up of papers read at the first annual meeting of Grand Dragons of the Ku Klux Klan in July, 1923. A paragraph of the preface, prepared by the Imperial Wizard, Dr. H. W. Evans, illustrated the official Klan position on the volume: "This book explains the principles, purposes and operation of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan fully in every detail. It is virtually a

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>37</sup>Grand Dragon of South Carolina, "The Regulation Of Immigration," Klan Papers, 72.

textbook on Klankraft and is dedicated to the Klansmen of America."<sup>38</sup>

### Political Influence and Law Enforcement

Perhaps the most violent criticism of the Klan arose because of incidents in which local Klans took the obligation of law enforcement into their own hands. The official Klan position with regard to law enforcement was expressed by Simmons:

"... let me emphasize that the Ku Klux Klan conducts its activities not only within the law, but in active support of the law. Our general organization would not tolerate for a moment any illegal act on the part of any of our local organizations. The Klan has not been formed to express little hatreds but to study crucial problems and aid in the execution of large national policies."<sup>39</sup>

This statement was published in The Klan Unmasked and reflected an attitude which Simmons realized the general public would receive favorably.

The fact remains, however, that violence did occur. During the period of rapid expansion by the Klan, October, 1920, to October, 1921, The New York World reported a wave of crime, justly or unjustly associated with the Klan, which included four killings, one mutilation, one branding-with-acid, forty-one floggings, twenty-seven tar-and-feather parties, five kidnappings, forty-three individuals warned to leave town or otherwise threatened, fourteen communities threatened by posters, and sixteen parades of masked men with warning placards.

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<sup>38</sup>H. W. Evans, "Preface," Klan Papers, 3.

<sup>39</sup>Simmons, op. cit., 18.

These incidents were characterized by two peculiarities: They occurred because of alleged violation of certain laws and they were committed after nightfall by parties whose identity was concealed by masks, thus following the general pattern associated with Klan violence.<sup>40</sup>

It is impossible to determine the extent to which Klan members participated in these acts of violence. However, it is obvious that the Klan was morally responsible for having created an atmosphere in which this type of incident could occur. It is interesting to note that this period of lawlessness coincided with the period of most rapid Klan growth. Although the Klan officially denied any association with these acts of violence, the Imperial Wizard admitted the possibility of Klan involvement: "The Wizard is not responsible for any violence. I am going to tell you now, you go home and do your duty and the first time you have a bunch of Klansmen that break a law do not get behind them."<sup>41</sup> By his phrasenology one would gather that the Imperial Wizard not only admitted the possibility of violence but actually expected it.

One may ask where were the regularly constituted law-enforcement officers when these acts of violence occurred? The answer, to a large extent, would be--in the Klan. There can be no doubt that while the Klan advocated support of law enforcement, its real idea of support was to enlist the aid of prominent men, especially those in strategic

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<sup>40</sup>Mecklin, op. cit., 6-10.

<sup>41</sup>Evans, "Where Do We Go From Here," Klan Papers, 13.

positions, in order to carry on Klan work. This program of enrolling persons of authority is illustrated in "The Klan Newsletter" of May 20, 1921, in which a local Klan pointed with pride to its successes:

"You may state in your weekly letter that in one city in Virginia we have the chief of police, the commonwealth attorney, the postmaster, the police court judge, members of the city council and managing editor of the leading paper and many other prominent business and professional men. This is Newport News."<sup>42</sup>

The difficulty which a public official, who was also a Klansman, would face in the attempt to carry out his designated duties is made apparent by an examination of Section IV of the Klan Oath in which each member was required to state: "I swear that I will keep secure to myself a secret of a klansman when same is committed to me in the sacred bond of Klansmanship--the crime of violating this oath, treason against the United States of America, rape, and malicious murder alone excepted."<sup>43</sup> Thus it is apparent that the Klan considered only four crimes, one of which is a crime against the Klan, serious enough to warrant exposure of a fellow member. This restriction imposed on American citizens greatly hindered the normal criminal procedure of our court system and it is impossible to overemphasize the effect of this restriction on the work of law enforcement officers in their constituted duties.

Another example of the method by which the Klan intended to

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<sup>42</sup>Fry, op. cit., 39.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 68-70.



promote its program under the guise of "aid" to law enforcement officers is illustrated in "The Klan Newsletter" of June 10, 1921:

"We have just taken in the chief of police. . . . When he learned he was to have our support in upholding the law he was certainly pleased, especially with our military organizations, which we offered him in case of trouble. He then informed us that the city is insufficiently protected and that we are sitting on a volcano regarding the negro question, that there is a great deal of unrest among them and that we might have a riot at any time and he was very much worried. . . . He welcomed us and the military company is to be trained and two hundred and sixty repeating rifles will be turned over to us in time of trouble. I asked how many of the three hundred present at the meeting would be willing to join the organization to assist the chief, and every one of them stood up. . . . The chief of police states that any man we select to head these two hundred and sixty Klansmen will be made by him assistant director of public safety in charge of the Klansmen."<sup>44</sup>

This reference illustrates the flexibility of the Klan program in attempts to gain the support of public officials in order to achieve desired goals. There can be no doubt that some public servants entered the Klan either due to ignorance of its principles or because of the necessity of becoming associated with an organization of tremendous political power. There were those, however, who not only worked closely with the Klan but actually placed Klan obligations before official responsibility. One such person revealed his ardent loyalty by remarking:

"I did not think it possible that my enthusiasm for our noble order could be increased, but your letter of the fourteenth has filled me with added inspiration. Having been offered an opportunity for service in the field in Missouri, I am resigning my position with the government here and hope soon to be among the chosen disciples

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 59-60.

of our great Emperor proclaiming his inspired doctrine of new freedom to the world. Beyond the simple office of treasurer in my home county I have never sought public honors nor craved political preference, but in the glorious work of this God-inspired order every ounce of my energy will strive for excellence. I shall never seek the honor or preferment of office except wherein I may contribute to the honor and preferment of my Klan. My fellow Klansmen have here seen fit to confer upon me the highest honor within their power, and God being my witness, I would not barter it for any other honor that life may hold."<sup>45</sup>

This example not only points out the enthusiasm with which some Klan members undertook their work but, more important, reveals that some would subordinate their sworn duties as public servants to the interests of the Invisible Empire.

#### Reason for Klan Membership

One question that undoubtedly plagued many Americans during the third decade of the twentieth century was the following: Why would anyone join an organization such as the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan? To answer this question it is necessary to disregard the few organizers and promoters who received personal satisfaction or financial rewards for their efforts and instead devote our attention to the millions of Americans who stood to gain no tangible reward for their efforts.

Klan members came from all sections of the United States but the greatest support was in areas which had been disturbed little by recent immigrant groups. Thus, a stronghold of Klanism was found in the South and areas of the Midwest and Pacific Northwest. These

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 62.

areas, in which Klunkraft had its greatest following, had in common three characteristics: (1) A citizenry predominantly Protestant and with a high percentage of Methodists and Baptists; (2) A citizenry made up predominantly of the old Anglo-Saxon stock; (3) A rural cultural pattern. Any area within the normal bounds of the Klan which lacked one or more of these characteristics usually failed to give strong support to the organization. An excellent example of this is the Southern portion of the state of Louisiana. Here Anglo-Saxon and Protestant domination was lacking, thus lessening considerably the possibility of its becoming a strong Klan area.

One member gave this statement as his reason for joining the Klan:

"I went into this one partly because I was a joiner and was curious to see what it was all about, but principally because I thought it was a fraternal order which was actually a revival of the original Ku Klux Klan. . . . That old organization has always had a certain glamour for me as it has for every other southerner. . . . I knew absolutely nothing about the structure of the new Ku Klux Klan, took it on faith, and assumed that in its government and administration, it would function like any other of the standard fraternal orders."<sup>46</sup>

This statement was made by a person who eventually assumed a position of leadership within the Klan and reveals the possibility that many persons joined the Klan in its early period through ignorance of the Klan program. Another point of view is expressed by John Moffatt Necklin, sociologist, whose book, The Ku Klux Klan: a study of The American Mind, emphasizes the point that many Americans who lived

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 2-3.

in rural areas felt the need for some activity to supplement their somewhat routine life. Mecklin points out that these Americans had been made to realize their essential mediocrity through the strains of social competition, but now for the mere sum of ten dollars they could become Knights in the Invisible Empire. When in history was knighthood gained for such a paltry sum?<sup>47</sup>

All of these reasons were important but the fact remains that for the most part Klan growth was not due primarily to ignorance or to a feeling of social inferiority but was due to the desire of some to associate themselves with the ideals of the Ku Klux Klan. Regardless of what the Imperial Wizard or some other spokesman might publish about the objectives of the Klan, the local solicitors used their discretion when outlining the Klan program for prospective members. One such example is found in the answer of a local solicitor when asked the objective of the Klan: "We are organized for the purpose of fighting the Catholic and Jews politically."<sup>48</sup> Therefore, it is obvious that the rapid growth of the Klan resulted primarily from the desire of various individuals to express their fears of and prejudices toward minority groups through a powerful national organization.

The Klan was an important element in American society throughout the third decade of the twentieth century. Although many attempts were made to expose the Klan, principally by the press, there is little evidence that these campaigns were successful on the national

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<sup>47</sup>Mecklin, op. cit., 104-108.

<sup>48</sup>Kelly Harp in a personal interview, June 28, 1960.

level. In fact, one Klan leader expressed his gratitude to the gentlemen of the press by remarking: "The press of the country has, more than any one agency, increased the membership of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan to what it is today. From the press the Klan received gratis, and is still receiving daily, advertisement that is worth millions in cold cash."<sup>49</sup>

How then was the Klan destroyed? This was accomplished only when the citizens of a community or state saw clearly the workings of the Klan and realized the extent to which a secret organization would go to disrupt the normal process of community life. It is the purpose of this paper to describe one such incident, an incident which occurred in the Northeast Louisiana Parish of Morehouse in 1922, which illustrated to the people of that section the extent to which the Klan would go in its position as self-appointed guardian of community morals. This incident, although never officially connected with the Klan, brought about the destruction of the local chapter when a majority of the people realized the dangers inherent in unregulated secret organizations.

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<sup>49</sup>Editor Imperial Night Hawk, "The Klan And The Press," Klan Papers, 93.

## CHAPTER II

### KLAN BACKGROUND IN MOREHOUSE PARISH

The Northeast Louisiana Parish of Morehouse, like many other areas in the United States, proved to be an ideal location for the development and growth of the twentieth century Ku Klux Klan. The white population of Morehouse Parish was predominantly Protestant, descended from Anglo-Saxon stock, and influenced by a rural environment. The Ku Klux Klan began in Morehouse Parish with the organization of a local chapter in 1921. Captain S. K. Skipwith, who had received the title "Captain" because he at one time had operated a steamboat, was selected as the Exalted Cyclops. "Captain" Skipwith had come to the parish a few years previously as a cottonseed buyer and had joined the Klan because of his affiliation with the original Klan which flourished immediately following the Civil War.

In Morehouse Parish, there was a negligible number of Jews and Catholics and, as the Negroes of the area were almost entirely dependent economically upon white land owners, the Klan was relieved of the necessity of concentrating its powers on any of these minority groups. Consequently, the Klan turned its attention to alleged violations of the law. According to "Captain" Skipwith, Morehouse Parish had been contemptuous of all laws prior to the organization of the Ku Klux Klan in that area, but actions of the Klan had

corrected this situation with the exception of the village of Mer Rouge, which was located approximately in the center of the parish. Skipwith stated that groups of Klansmen, under his personal leadership at times, had made raids to correct such illegal practices as the possession of liquor, destruction of cattle-dipping vats, and the distillation of "moonshine" whisky. According to Skipwith, Klansmen were instrumental in driving undesirable women from the parish, and on one occasion had expressed more conventional Klan ideals by forcing a young woman school teacher to resign because she was of the Roman Catholic faith.<sup>1</sup>

For approximately one year Klan activity flourished in Morehouse Parish. There were numerous accounts of hooded mob activity with no record of any arrest or conviction prior to intervention by the governor of Louisiana. It is correct to assume that little if any of the mob activity would have been brought to the attention of the public had there not been an open hearing in Eastrop, Louisiana, from January 5, 1923, through January 25, 1923, for the purpose of investigating the most serious of all violations attributed to the Klan, the kidnapping of five men and the subsequent murder of two of them.

Usually the victims of the mobs had been unable to identify their assailants, but on several occasions positive identification had been made. One incident in which positive identification of mob members was possible was revealed by Miss Addie May Hamilton,

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<sup>1</sup>John Rogers, The Murders of Mer Rouge (St. Louis: Security Publishing Co., 1923), 21-23.

a seventeen-year-old resident of Mer Rouge who told of being forced to leave her family and home in Mer Rouge by a group of Black-robed men. At approximately 10:30 o'clock on the night of January 22, 1922, Miss Hamilton's mother responded to a knock on the door of her home but quickly slammed the door upon seeing a masked mob gathered on the lawn. The mob gained entry to the Hamilton home through a side door and Dr. H. H. McKoin, leader of the Mer Rouge Ku Klux Klan, said to Mrs. Hamilton, "Addie May has to leave Mer Rouge tonight. She is leading an immoral life." Mrs. Hamilton prevailed upon the men to allow her daughter to remain, but Dr. McKoin's reply was that Mrs. Hamilton would be tarred and feathered if she continued to object. Miss Hamilton was then taken by automobile to the railway depot, was given the seven dollar train fare by Dr. McKoin, and was forced to board the 11:25 P. M. train bound for Little Rock, Arkansas.<sup>2</sup>

Hugh Clark, a resident of Mer Rouge for eighteen years, later explained the circumstances which allowed Miss Hamilton to return to her family in Mer Rouge. Clark, while on business in Little Rock, called on Miss Hamilton at the home of her sister where she had taken refuge. Clark, who was accompanied by W. E. Hopkins of Mer Rouge, was told the story of Addie May's forced departure in January. Miss

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<sup>2</sup>Attorney General A. V. Coco, after conducting a three-week open hearing in Bastrop, Louisiana, presented a transcript of the testimony to the Morehouse Parish grand jury. After an unsuccessful search for this primary source in the Morehouse Parish Courthouse and the Attorney General's office in Baton Rouge, this writer selected The Times-Picayune of New Orleans as the most complete available account of the proceedings and testimony of the hearing. The Times-Picayune (New Orleans), January 11, 1923.



Hamilton explained that she wished to return to her home and asked Clark and Hopkins if they could help her. Clark promised to give what assistance he could, and upon his return to Mer Rouge spoke to several Klansmen. He also talked with "Captain" Skipwith who said that he had no objections to Miss Hamilton's return. Eventually, Clark obtained a paper signed by twelve Mer Rouge Klansmen which authorized Miss Hamilton's return. This information was sent to Miss Hamilton in Little Rock and she immediately rejoined her family in Mer Rouge.<sup>3</sup>

Another example of Klan rule was revealed by Alonzo Braddock, a life-long resident of Morehouse Parish. Braddock stated that at approximately 1:30 or 2 o'clock on a morning in November he was awakened by shouts and curses outside his home. He looked out the window, saw a masked mob, and asked the men to wait until he dressed. Before he had completed dressing, the mob broke down the door and entered the Braddock home. One of the masked men announced, "We want you for making whiskey." Braddock recognized the speaker as "Captain" Skipwith and he and his wife begged Skipwith to turn Braddock over to Sheriff Fred Carpenter if there were any charges to be made against him. After being assured that he would not be harmed, Braddock was placed in one of the waiting automobiles and was then driven to the home of Sheriff Carpenter in Bastrop. Braddock remained in the Carpenter home that night and was released the next morning without being indicted or having any charges brought against him.<sup>4</sup> Sheriff

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., January 12, 1923.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., January 14, 1923.

Carpenter later testified that Skipwith, on the day prior to the raid at the Braddock home, had reported that a whisky still had been located. The Sheriff explained that he had deputized Skipwith and his men so that they might bring in any prisoners.<sup>5</sup>

The two incidents mentioned above indicate the extent to which Klan members took the law into their own hands. Both Addie May Hamilton and Alonzo Braddock had been forceably and illegally removed from their homes--an unquestionable act of kidnapping. In neither case was the victim physically harmed. Other victims of mob action, however, were not so fortunate. Tom Robinson, a fifty-year-old farmer who owned a forty-eight acre farm located near the Louisiana-Arkansas line, testified that on Sunday morning June 18, 1922, he had gone to the Sunrise Methodist Church about 10:00 o'clock, one-half hour before services were to begin. He had planned to use this time to select the songs for the service as he was the song-leader for the congregation. Hearing a car drive up and assuming that some of the church members were arriving early, he sent his young niece to see who had arrived. The child returned crying, "Uncle Tom, Uncle Tom, it's the Ku Klux." Robinson then went to the door of the church where he was met by a hooded man armed with a pistol. He was forced by the mob into one of the automobiles and was driven some distance away from the church. He was then taken into the woods and after removing his clothing, was placed over a log and severely beaten. After receiving one whipping he was asked if he would "straighten up

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., January 16, 1923.

and quit the lawless gang." He said that he would, but was again beaten when one of the mob said, "Let's give it to him again."

Robinson said that he was unable to recognize any of the men as he had been blindfolded. Robinson further stated that he had, prior to the beating, received a note in which he was accused of blowing up cattle-dipping vats.<sup>6</sup>

There were many other examples of masked men engaged in carrying out their self-appointed role as guardians of the morals of the community. H. C. Osgood testified that he left Morehouse Parish in the summer of 1922, after being taken by a group of hooded men and lashed about fifty times.<sup>7</sup> Fred Cobb, a resident of Eastrop, was taken by a group of five hooded men, one of whom was armed, and lectured on his morals. Although Cobb escaped punishment, his life was threatened by Laurie Calhoun, the only member of the group that he was able to recognize.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps one of the most common methods of intimidating persons was the practice of sending anonymous letters in which the recipient was ordered to leave the parish. One such letter was produced in the open hearing in Eastrop and presented as evidence. The letter is here produced in its entirety:

"Dear Sir--

The committee after watching your mode of living  
and your utter disregard of the laws of our land against

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., January 25, 1923.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., January 21, 1923.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., January 14, 1923.

the manufacture and sale of liquor, and the peaceable and unmolested possession of property, have decided that your open violations of the law and your constant depredations upon the cattle, hogs, and sheep, etc., of your neighbors makes you a most undesirable citizen.

You will, therefore, accept this as a notice and warning to you to depart from this parish at the expiration of ten days from the time of receipt of same, never to return again.

If you fail to obey this order you must take the consequences.

"VICILANCE COMMITTEE."9

The reaction of persons receiving letters of this nature varied. Dewey Brown was ordered to leave his home near Ruston early in 1922, but was permitted to remain after effecting a compromise by which he was put on a sixty-day probation. But McCowen received a warning letter on March 12, 1922, and left the parish. He was allowed to return after his wife gained the aid of influential Klansmen. L. C. Osborn, son-in-law of McCowen, also received a letter ordering him from the parish. At the time of his testimony, January, 1923, Osborn was residing in Madison Parish.<sup>10</sup>

Klan warnings were by no means restricted to individuals as is evidenced by the testimony of G. W. Walker, a member of the Missionary Baptist Church near Collinston. Walker told of an incident in which four men, Mr. F. M. McKoin and "Link" Kirkpatrick alone recognized, entered the church and read a notice to the congregation ordering that disorders would have to stop. The "disorders" referred

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., January 21, 1923.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

to a fight which had occurred near the church a short time previously.<sup>11</sup>

All members of the Klan were not willing to carry out the orders of their superiors. James T. Norworthy testified that he resigned from the Klan when ordered to take three men, J. C. Walls, Jordan Bailey, and "Sunny" King, to the Arkansas line, beat them, and order them never to return. E. W. Andrews, another former member, reported that he refused to take part in the deportation of Addie May Hamilton when so ordered by Dr. P. M. McKoin. Andrews also named two other Klansmen who refused the same order.<sup>12</sup>

The responsibility for the mob violence in Morehouse Parish rests primarily with a small group of men intent upon personally enforcing the laws of the state, but in so doing, grossly violating other laws. The community as a whole, however, was not without guilt. This was illustrated in a sermon delivered on January 21, 1923, by the Reverend Leon W. Sloan (reputedly a Klan member), pastor of the Baptist Church in Bastrop, in which the minister stated that the church would have to share the blame for conditions in Morehouse Parish.<sup>13</sup> Until August 24, 1922, the citizens of Morehouse Parish either condoned the activities of the Klan or by their silence allowed its existence. The extent of Klan membership in the parish was revealed by A. E. Ferland who was in charge of the investigation conducted by

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., January 17, 1923.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., January 10, 1923.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., January 22, 1923.

the United States Department of Justice in Morehouse Parish. In a report which he submitted to Governor Parker, Investigator Farland placed Klan membership prior to August, 1922, as consisting of five hundred of the eight hundred male voters of the parish.<sup>14</sup> This condition led to the following observation by a citizen of Lake Charles, J. A. Williams:

"... A small percentage of its [Ku Klux Klan] members always reserve in their minds and insist that in some mysterious way the Klan is divinely endowed with the right to take the law into its own hands when officials fail to act.

This was the claim in Morehouse Parish. It cannot be too often repeated that in Morehouse the sheriff was a Klansman, his deputies were Klansmen, the district attorney was a Klansman and nine members of the grand jury were Klansmen. If the laws therefore were not enforced in Morehouse Parish, the responsibility must be placed squarely on the Ku Klux Klan."<sup>15</sup>

#### Incidents Between Klan and Victims Prior to Their Death

The preceding violations of human rights occurred during a brief period which began with the establishment of the Ku Klux Klan in Morehouse Parish late in 1921 and continued until August, 1922. On August 24, 1922, a mob of black-hooded men committed a crime far more serious than anything heretofore attributed to this element of the parish. On that date, August 24, 1922, a mob of approximately twenty to twenty-five men took five citizens of Mer Rouge from their automobiles on a public highway in plain view of several dozen citizens of the parish. Of the five men, one was released unharmed, two

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., January 28, 1923.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., March 25, 1923.

were severely beaten and released, and the remaining two were brutally murdered and their bodies concealed for four months.

This act shocked the community, indeed the state and nation, although it should not have been too unreasonable to expect an act of this nature to culminate the events of the past few months. Although the Ku Klux Klan was never officially connected with this atrocity, as indeed no one was found guilty of the crime, there was little doubt in the minds of unbiased observers that the Klan, or members of the Klan acting in an unofficial capacity, was responsible for the act.

The two victims of the mob were Watt Daniel and Thomas F. Richards, men who were known as having publicly opposed the Klan and who, in the past, had had disputes with members of the organization. Perhaps the first clash between the Klan and Watt Daniel occurred in the summer of 1922. Approximately ten members of the Morehouse Parish Ku Klux Klan, men from both Eastrop and Mer Rouge, were staging a raid on a Negro's home located a few miles north of Mer Rouge. The Klan's interest was occasioned by reports that gambling had been occurring there. The group of Klansmen reached the house shortly before midnight and realized that an automobile had stopped in the road approximately one hundred yards behind them. The leader of the mob, armed with a revolver and followed by the other members of the group, advanced to the automobile, opened the door, and asked the occupants of the automobile to identify themselves. The forthcoming answer was Watt Daniel, W. C. Andrews, and Harry Neelis. The Klan leader, thinking that they had been intentionally followed by the

three men, asked the group what should be done with the men. Although someone replied, "Let's whip them," three or four in the group who were friends of the proposed victims disagreed and finally their judgment prevailed. The leader of the mob questioned Daniel concerning a rumor to the effect that he had been making whisky. Daniel replied that this was true, as in the past he had made whisky. He further stated that he had stopped and had destroyed his equipment. This explanation seemed to satisfy the mob and the three men were released without being harmed.<sup>16</sup>

The first important incident between T. F. Richards and the Klan occurred at approximately the same time. Richards was employed as a mechanic for a local garage and used the back portion of the building as his workshop. As the local facilities for any large gathering were limited, the garage had been selected by a fraternal organization as the site of a supper. The Mer Rouge Klan leader, who was also a member of the fraternal organization, was in charge of the arrangements for the occasion. Early in the day which had been selected for the supper, Richards had asked the Klan leader to leave a passageway through the front of the garage so that Richards could move automobiles to and from his shop. Richards later found the passage blocked and sought out the man responsible. An argument ensued and only the intervention of bystanders prevented violence.<sup>17</sup>

Around the end of July, 1922, an incident occurred which,

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<sup>16</sup>Kelly Harp in a personal interview, June 28, 1960.

<sup>17</sup>The Times-Picayune, December 25, 1922.



according to many local observers, served as the motive for the murder of Richards and Daniel approximately a month later. Dr. J. M. McKoin, the acknowledged leader of the Ku Klux Klan in Mer Rouge, received a request for his professional services a short distance from Mer Rouge. Upon his arrival at his destination, he was informed by the residents that they had made no call. He then returned to Mer Rouge and as he approached the village, his automobile was fired upon. Dr. McKoin's story was accepted in its entirety by the majority of his friends, although many residents of Mer Rouge questioned it. There were others who believed that Dr. McKoin fired the bullets himself. According to some citizens of Mer Rouge, Dr. McKoin fabricated this incident as he desired to withdraw from the Klan and also wished to leave Mer Rouge. They further stated that Dr. McKoin intended to use the incident to justify both actions. Those who advanced this theory believed that had Dr. McKoin been in his automobile at the time the shots were fired, he could not possibly have escaped injury.<sup>18</sup> This theory was partially substantiated later when agents of the United States Department of Justice examined Dr. McKoin's automobile and found that two loads of buckshot had entered the cab of the automobile through a curtain in the rear. Most of the shot passed directly over the steering wheel and one shot shattered a spoke in the wheel. The investigators expressed the opinion that Dr. McKoin's version of the shooting was inaccurate as they stated that anyone occupying the

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., December 23, 1922.

driver's seat would have been struck by the shot.<sup>19</sup>

There were others who believed that neither of the above versions was true. Instead, they interpreted the incident as an attempt to avenge the death of Dr. Thom, who was killed by Dr. McKoin in 1916.<sup>20</sup> The importance of this attempt whether factual or fabricated to assassinate Dr. McKoin lies not so much in the fact that it created a situation of ill-feeling between Klan and non-Klan citizens, but that it furnished the only reasonable motive for the murder of Richards and Daniel a month later.

"Captain" S. K. Skipwith, leader and spokesman of the Ku Klux Klan in Morehouse Parish, on more than one occasion directly linked the attempt on Dr. McKoin's life with the kidnapping of Matt Daniel and Thomas Richards. Early in September, 1922, Skipwith, in an open letter to Governor Parker, referred to the kidnapping of the two men as the "closing scene" in the attempted murder of Dr. McKoin, and informed the governor that "the kidnapping of Daniel and Richards by the friends of Dr. McKoin was the result of a diabolical attempt to assassinate him, which attempt was treated and looked upon by the people of Mer Rouge as a common, insignificant occurrence demanding little or no attention."<sup>21</sup> Skipwith's evaluation of the incident never faltered and approximately five months later, in an interview with newspapermen at the close of the open hearing in Bastrop, the aging Cyclops,

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid... December 24, 1922.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid... December 23, 1922.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid... September 12, 1922.

careful to steer clear of any Klan implication, stated that, although Dr. McKoin knew nothing of the kidnapping, it was carried out by his friends, both Masons and physicians. After stating that Richards had not been killed but had been placed on a train at Rayville, Skipwith continued:

"They killed Watt for shooting at McKoin. McKoin had recognized Daniel and Richards right after the shooting. . . . They all plotted to kill McKoin. They sat at a round table, him, [Watt] Richards, Hugo Havenport, the black sheep of a good family, old man Whipple and Campbell. I told them they would have trouble if they didn't get rid of those boys over there."<sup>22</sup>

Further evidence which indicates that the Klan considered Richards and Daniel responsible for the attempt on Dr. McKoin's life is found in the fact that both Daniel and Richards were questioned by hooded mobs regarding the attempted assassination. Mrs. T. F. Richards, wife of one of the slain men, later testified that on July 18, 1922, one week before his death, her husband was taken from his place of employment, a garage in Eastrop, by a group of hooded men. The men drove Richards into a wooded area and questioned him extensively about the alleged part he played in the attempt on the life of Dr. McKoin. Mrs. Richards also stated that her husband revealed to her that one of his captors was "Captain" S. K. Skipwith, Exalted Cyclops of the Morehouse Parish Ku Klux Klan.<sup>23</sup> Thus it is impossible to disassociate the alleged attempt on Dr. McKoin's life with the murder of Daniel and Richards approximately one month later.

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., January 26, 1923.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., January 11, 1923.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE MOREHOUSE PARISH MURDERS

On August 24, 1922, Eastrop, Louisiana, parish seat of Morehouse, was the site of a baseball game and public barbecue which were given to insure a large attendance for a meeting sponsoring road improvements within the parish. The idea was successful as a large crowd representing all sections of the parish was assembled. At the close of the festivities at approximately 6 o'clock in the evening, most of the group from Mer Rouge began the drive home. Approximately one mile beyond the city limits of Eastrop the group of automobiles was halted.<sup>1</sup> J. L. Daniel, accompanied by Tom Peterson, was in the first car which was stopped. Daniel stated that he brought his automobile to a halt after seeing a touring car stopped in the road ahead. At first glance, Daniel and Peterson thought that the automobile had stopped due to mechanical failure. This assumption was immediately altered when a group of twenty or twenty-five masked men carrying firearms surrounded Daniel's automobile. The masked men demanded that Daniel accompany them, forced him from his automobile, blindfolded him, and led him approximately twenty-five feet

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<sup>1</sup>Rogers, Op. cit., 25.

from the road where he was told to sit down.<sup>2</sup> The mob continued with a systematic search of the remaining vehicles and forced four other men to leave their automobiles. These men, W. C. Andrews, C. C. Davenport, Watt Daniel, and T. F. Richards, were also blindfolded and taken to the area where J. L. Daniel was being held. The five men were then placed in two vehicles, a Ford touring car and a Ford truck. According to the testimony of W. C. Andrews, they were first driven back to Bastrop. Andrews explained that although he was blindfolded he realized they were in Bastrop because of the characteristic odor of the paper mill located in that town. The automobile trip continued for almost an hour and then both vehicles stopped in what was described as a wooded area at a distance of about thirty yards from the road.

J. L. Daniel and W. C. Andrews were questioned about any information which they might have regarding the attempted assassination of Dr. McKoin and were told that they would be killed if they didn't tell who was responsible for the act. Both Andrews and J. L. Daniel denied having any knowledge as to the identity of the would-be assassins. Both men were forced to remove their trousers and were beaten with a leather strap. Andrews stated that he was struck about forty times and the elder Daniel, somewhat less. After both men said they could not identify any one in the masked group they, along with C. C. Davenport who had not been harmed, were returned to the automobile,

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<sup>2</sup>The Times-Picayune, January 7, 1923.

driven to Collinston, and released at the rear of the railway depot.<sup>3</sup> Upon his release, J. L. Daniel asked about his son who was still in the custody of the masked men. The reply was, "One of the men may come back. . . . the other will have to leave the country."<sup>4</sup> The three men who had been released were able to obtain the use of an automobile in Collinston and returned to their homes in Mer Rouge where Daniel and Andrews received medical attention.

A short time later Guy Boyd, a storekeeper in Collinston, sold gasoline to two hooded men who were driving a Ford touring car and a Ford truck. Although Boyd was unable to identify any of the masked men, he stated that he saw two men in the rear of the Ford truck. He further stated that he was unable to positively identify them as Watt Daniel and T. F. Richards as their faces were covered with white handkerchiefs.<sup>5</sup> Two other residents of Collinston saw the masked men as they bought gasoline at Boyd's store. Ed Morris, a railroad clerk, saw both vehicles driven by the hooded men and the two blindfolded captives seated in the rear of the truck. He was not able to identify any of the men nor did he see the license plates of either vehicle. Robert Lee Harkness, clerk for Boyd's service station, testified that he saw the two vehicles, a Ford touring car occupied by four or five masked men and a truck containing two masked men in the front and two blindfolded men in the back who were guarded by a third masked man

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Rogers, op. cit., 26.

<sup>5</sup>The Times-Picayune, January 16, 1923.

armed with a pistol. Harkness, like the other witnesses, was unable to identify any members of the group.<sup>6</sup>

Two other persons were believed to have seen the two kidnapped men later that night. Lawrence Leon Jones, accompanied by his wife and child, was traveling from the Breckenridge, Texas, oil fields to his home in Nosselle, Mississippi, when his automobile broke down a short distance from the Lake Lafourche ferry (located on the road from Oak Ridge, Louisiana, to Rayville, Louisiana). Jones and his family had remained in their car to await the arrival of parts necessary for its repair. Shortly before midnight on August 24, 1922, Jones and his wife saw two vehicles pass along the road in the direction of the Lake Lafourche ferry. The vehicles were identified as a Ford touring car and a Ford truck, each of which contained four or five masked men and one blindfolded man. Jones stated that the blindfolded men were in a sitting position but he was unable to say whether they were dead or alive. Jones further testified that approximately one hour later the same vehicles returned, but without their blindfolded occupants.<sup>7</sup>

#### Governor Parker's Action--Conference with President Harding

For a brief period in New Rouge, the idea prevailed that the two men would soon return unharmed. This assumption was based on the fact that on previous occasions the men had been taken out and had been subsequently released with no physical injury inflicted. As late as

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<sup>6</sup>The Shreveport Journal (Shreveport), January 17, 1923.

<sup>7</sup>The Times-Picayune, January 26, 1923.

August 29, 1922, five days after the kidnapping, Mrs. Richards was quoted as having dismissed the theory that her husband had been murdered by stating, "I know nothing about my husband's whereabouts . . . but I believe he is hold prisoner."<sup>8</sup> This idea that the men were alive and unharmed soon began to wane and as the days passed the families of the kidnapped men began to suspect that perhaps the men had been murdered. The belief that her husband had been murdered and also that the Ku Klux Klan was responsible was expressed by Mrs. T. F. Richards in a letter written to Governor Parker approximately two weeks following the disappearance of her husband. Mrs. Richards wrote that "just because he was not scared by the klan, they have done this, and they are now trying to make out it was not the klan, but it was the klan. . . . I believe he is dead, because I know he would have written if he is alive."<sup>9</sup>

It would appear that little was done during this period by the parish authorities. Several months later, John Rogers, a newspaper reporter, interviewed Sheriff Fred Carpenter and asked the officer what action had been taken at the time of the kidnapping. Sheriff Carpenter explained that he had been aware of the previous kidnapping of Richards in Bastrop and his subsequent release. In view of this knowledge, Sheriff Carpenter explained, "I was in town when that [the August, 24, 1922, kidnapping] happened . . . and went as

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., August 30, 1922.

<sup>9</sup>Richards to Parker, quoted in The Shreveport Journal, September 9, 1922.



far as the edge of town, but saw nothing. I did not think that that would turn out seriously either."<sup>10</sup> Rogers then asked the sheriff if it were too late to begin an investigation and the sheriff replied, "I understand the Governor has started one . . . and it is now in his hands."<sup>11</sup>

On the night of August 28, 1922, Governor Parker received a telephone call from Mrs. Richards in which the lady requested the aid of the governor in determining the whereabouts of her husband. On the following day, Governor Parker received a similar request for aid in a letter written by J. L. Daniel who sought the assistance of the chief executive in locating the other victim of the kidnapping, Daniel's son, Fillmore Watt Daniel. Thus was John M. Parker, governor of the state of Louisiana, acquainted with the crime which occurred on August 24, 1922, in the Northeast Louisiana Parish of Morehouse. The action which followed was that the judge of the district was asked to call a special session of the Morehouse Parish grand jury in order to establish responsibility for the crime. This grand jury, which met two weeks after the kidnapping, failed to show who was responsible for the outrages or to disclose any information. Governor Parker later described the report of the grand jury as "complete whitewash." He also repeated the rumor that nine of the twelve members of the grand jury were active Klansmen.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Rogers, op. cit., 29.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>The Times-Picayune, February 27, 1923.

On September 9, 1922, immediately after the Morehouse Parish grand jury failed to return any true bills with regard to the mob violence, Governor Parker again took the initiative by instructing Louisiana Attorney General Coco to investigate the case. In a letter to Judge Coco the governor stated:

"When mob violence and the 'invisible Klan' attempt to rise superior to the laws of our state, every power at our command should be exercised to stamp out such violence and have peace, law, and order prevail. You are hereby requested to make vigorous and thorough investigation of the outrages committed in Morehouse Parish. Take prompt steps for a thorough investigation, early indictment, and vigorous prosecution of those responsible. The full power of the state, civil and military, will be at your command. The issue is clearly drawn. Neither mob violence nor the Ku Klux Klan shall run this state. The law must and shall prevail and your vigorous and prompt assistance is relied on."<sup>13</sup>

In addition to evoking the full civil and military authority in pursuing a solution to the crime, the governor also offered a financial reward in the following proclamation:

"I, John Parker, governor of the state of Louisiana, do hereby issue this my proclamation offering a reward of \$500 for the arrest and conviction of those responsible for this gross violation of the law and appeal to good citizens in the parish of Morehouse to lend me a helping hand in procuring the prompt arrest and conviction of those guilty of such outrages."<sup>14</sup>

This reward was later supplemented by an additional five hundred dollars offered by J. L. Daniel, father of Watt Daniel, who stated that this amount would be greatly increased if this would be of

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<sup>13</sup>Parker to Coco, quoted in The Shreveport Journal, September 9, 1922.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

assistance to the police.<sup>15</sup>

It is evident that Governor Parker not only utilized the police powers of the state of Louisiana in an attempt to bring to justice the persons guilty of the August 24, 1922, crime, but that he also took steps to solicit the aid of the United States Department of Justice. In a letter dated October 30, 1922, written by Governor Parker to Joseph Morningstar, a resident of New York and former wartime friend of Watt Daniel, Parker stated that he was doing everything possible to find Daniel's murderers. The governor also suggested that Morningstar could perhaps be of help:

"It will be necessary to use all the influence at your command to get the United States Government to take an interest in this matter. . . . could I impose upon you by asking you to get in touch with all your congressmen and Senators, requesting that they take the matter up with the Department of Justice to see not only is this matter probed to the bottom, but that the murderers are brought before the bar of Justice?"<sup>16</sup>

Morningstar responded by requesting the aid of United States Senator David I. Walsh of Massachusetts. In a letter dated November 9, 1922, to Senator Walsh, Morningstar stated that his personal interest in the case came as a result of his friendship with Watt Daniel as they had served in the same company of a tank corps during World War I. He testified that Daniel was a man of the highest character and moral integrity. He explained that after presenting

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., September 11, 1922.

<sup>16</sup>John M. Parker to Joseph Morningstar, October 30, 1922, quoted in Cong. Record, 67 Cong., 3 Sess., LXIII, 15 (November 21, 1922).

facts to the Department of Justice he had received no encouragement and suggested to Senator Walsh, "Because of your eminence in the national standing . . . a request from you and any of your colleagues that you may interest in the case would do more to right this grievous wrong than anything that I could do."<sup>17</sup> Senator Walsh expressed an interest in the case and read Morningstar's letter before the United States Senate. Walsh further pursued the issue in a request to United States Attorney General Daugherty on November 27, 1922, in which the Senator proposed that President Harding issue a proclamation for disbandment of the Ku Klux Klan. It was pointed out that similar action had been taken by President Grant in dealing with the original Klan.<sup>18</sup>

In an effort to insure better federal cooperation in the investigation of the case, Governor Parker, accompanied by Attorney General Cocco, traveled to Washington, D. C., on November 20, 1922. Following a conference with President Harding, Attorney General Daugherty, and W. J. Burns, Chief of the Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice, Governor Parker issued the following statement:

"The responsible government of the state is determined that regardless of cost or consequence, a most thorough investigation will be made of the outrages reported to have been made by the Ku Klux Klan in Louisiana.

Certain terrorizing outrages have been committed, certain horrifying crimes have been reported, and it is vital that responsibility shall be fixed and offenders punished, not because of any organized

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<sup>17</sup>Joseph Morningstar to David I. Walsh, November 9, 1922, quoted in Cong. Record, 67 Cong., 3 Sess., LXIII, 15 (November 21, 1922).

<sup>18</sup>The Times-Picayune, November 28, 1922.

association, but in spite of this."<sup>19</sup>

President Harding also issued a statement following the conference in which the president said:

"It appears that the state of Louisiana will be fully able to take care of this situation. There is nothing at this time for the federal government to do except to give assurances to the state authorities that wherever federal interests are involved federal authorities are ready to extend full co-operation."<sup>20</sup>

The tone of President Harding's statement was undoubtedly an attempt to stifle rumors that Governor Parker had come to Washington for the express purpose of obtaining federal intervention in Louisiana. This rumor was probably the result of an article in The Washington Post on November 19, 1922, one day before Governor Parker arrived in Washington. George Rothwell Brown, the author of the article, presented a front-page item for his newspaper which was a clear exaggeration of conditions existing in Louisiana. Brown's report included such remarks as, "The machinery of state government has almost ceased to function" and "The Ku Klux Klan has . . . virtually reduced the sovereign state of Louisiana to the vassalage of the invisible empire." After having set such a lurid stage, the article then authoritatively stated:

"Governor John M. Parker has gone to Washington to lay the whole situation before President Harding, to inform the federal authorities that state law has virtually come to a stop in Louisiana in the face of the mysterious power of the Klan, and to ask the United States government to take over the administration of the law

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., November 21, 1922.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

in Louisiana or in certain specified portions of the state."<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps the first to denounce Brown's story was Governor Parker, who, in an open letter to The Washington Post dated November 20, 1922, (the day of Parker's arrival in Washington and the day following the release of Brown's story) stated:

"Never since I have been reading newspapers have I known a writer to build such a fanciful superstructure on such a slight foundation of fact. . . . The article is a slander on Louisiana and on its chief executive.

I did not see your correspondent and he made no application for an interview. . . . To state that the Klan has reduced the sovereign state of Louisiana to the vassalage of the invisible empire is one of the most extravagantly inaccurate observations I have ever known a newspaperman to make."<sup>22</sup>

The statement was also answered by citizens of the state. In addition to newspaper editorials attacking The Washington Post article, citizens of Monroe, Louisiana, held a mass meeting on November 21, 1922, and adopted resolutions which severely condemned the action of The Washington Post in printing an article which was described by the resolutions as slander upon the state of Louisiana.<sup>23</sup>

Condemnation of the article also reached the floor of the United States Senate. Joseph E. Ransdell, United States Senator from Louisiana, referred to the Post story as vicious and untrue and remarked that he was shocked by the action of the hitherto conservative Washington newspaper in allowing such an exaggerated report to

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., November 20, 1922.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., November 21, 1922.

<sup>23</sup>The Shreveport Journal, November 22, 1922.

secure a position on the front page of that newspaper. Senator Keadell, in an effort to repudiate the story, explained that for the past six weeks he had traveled through several sections of the state of Louisiana and had found nothing to warrant such extreme statements. He further expressed the opinion that the Mer Rouge crime, "the worst that has occurred in Louisiana during the past four years," was insignificant when compared to the race riots of Chicago in 1920 and the West Virginia miners' war of 1921.<sup>24</sup>

In the United States House of Representatives three members from Louisiana took the occasion to denounce The Washington Post and to present a defense of their state. Representative Riley J. Wilson described Morehouse Parish, a part of his Congressional District, as "one of the most progressive and law-abiding Parishes in Louisiana, and the town of Mer Rouge . . . is one of the best communities in the State."<sup>25</sup> Representative John N. Sandlin explained that according to Governor Parker no interview had been granted with Brown, and therefore, in Sandlin's opinion, the situation was "a controversial matter between the Governor of Louisiana and The Washington Post."<sup>26</sup> Representative Sandlin then remarked that it was his desire to inform the members of the House that "conditions in Louisiana . . . would not justify the slanderous article which was carried in the Post on

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<sup>24</sup>Cong. Record, 67 Cong., 3 Sess., LXIII, 14 (November 21, 1922).

<sup>25</sup>Cong. Record, 67 Cong., 3 Sess., LXIII, 36 (November 22, 1922).

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 36-37.

Sunday."<sup>27</sup>

Although Representatives Wilson and Sandlin were content with presenting their denunciation of the Post article before the House, others seemed to regard the incident as an opportunity for personal political gain. Representative James I. Aswell prefaced his remarks by having the entire text of the November 19, 1922, Washington Post article by George Rothwell Brown read into the Congressional Record. He then proceeded to read the text of a telegram which he had sent to each sheriff and judge in the eight parishes of his congressional district requesting that each recipient reply with an account of the situation within his jurisdiction. The various replies which totaled nineteen and which unanimously denied the Post story, were also read to the members of the House. Thus having presented evidence of the calm existing in his district in Louisiana, Representative Aswell began a personal attack upon Governor Parker who, in the opinion of the speaker, was responsible for the scandalous situation. Aswell acknowledged that it was entirely proper for the attorney general of a state to consult with federal officials on matters of law enforcement but said that it was "quite another matter for the Governor of Louisiana to create a nation-wide sensation and inflict irreparable injury upon his State."<sup>28</sup> Representative Aswell then stated:

"... to the humiliation and regret of all our people the Governor of Louisiana with his insatiable thirst for publicity is responsible for the grave injury done

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 33.



our State. What should be done with a Governor who for personal or political preferment would sacrifice or assassinate the fair name of his own State is a question to be settled by the people of Louisiana."<sup>29</sup>

A clearer idea that The Washington Post article was being used as a local political issue was expressed by The Times-Picayune staff on November 22, 1922, in an editorial which expressed this opinion, "Here and there a few--representative as well of the Eighth District serving as the conspicuous example--rushed into print with hysterical denunciation of Governor Parker and contrived thereby a place in the lurid picture and a share of the attendant notoriety for whatever it may be worth, politically or otherwise."<sup>30</sup>

As an anticlimax, The Washington Post on November 26, 1922, published a petition signed by citizens of Mer Rouge which expressed the idea that Brown's story on the Louisiana Klan was "true as far as Morehouse Parish is concerned--and that conditions are even worse."<sup>31</sup>

#### Incidents Between Mer Rouge and Eastrop

The village of Mer Rouge, the home of Loth Watt Daniel and T. F. Richards, prior to August 24, 1922, could not be termed a strong Klan community, although the local chapter numbered approximately seventy-five members. Following the disappearance of Daniel and Richards,

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>The Times-Picayune, November 22, 1922.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., November 27, 1922.

approximately ninety-five percent of the Klan members immediately dropped out of the organization, thus presenting a clear indication that the majority of the community felt that the Klan was responsible for the disappearance of the two men.<sup>32</sup> The same can not be said for Bastrop, the parish seat, as its chapter continued for approximately one year after the disappearance of Daniel and Richards.

A few days after the disappearance of Richards and Daniel, a rumor was circulated in Mer Rouge that persons from Bastrop intended to come to Mer Rouge and punish those who opposed the Klan. A similar report was spread in Bastrop that a Mer Rouge group intended to stage a raid on Bastrop Klansmen. Both reports proved false but a group of armed men in both communities gathered to repel the expected attack.<sup>33</sup> A large number of citizens in Mer Rouge took measures for their own protection, and it was not uncommon to see loaded rifles and shotguns in homes and in places of business in the few weeks which followed the August 24, 1922, kidnapping.

There were some who no doubt thought the fears of the Mer Rouge community unfounded. Sheriff Fred Carpenter of Morehouse Parish, in a telegram to Congressman Ripley J. Wilson, minimized the conditions that existed by remarking, "The Parish is in better condition as regards crime than it has ever been."<sup>34</sup> This opinion, however, was incorrect. Not only had a large group of citizens from Mer Rouge

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<sup>32</sup>Kelly Harp in a personal interview, June 28, 1960.

<sup>33</sup>The Times-Picayune, December 23, 1922.

<sup>34</sup>The Shreveport Journal, November 27, 1922.

witnessed the kidnapping of five men, which resulted in the beating of two of them and the death of two others, but in the weeks that followed this incident the entire community had been subjected to numerous threats.

One such threat was in the form of a letter posted in Bayville, Louisiana, approximately twenty-five miles from Mer Rouge in the adjacent parish of Richland, on September 7, 1922. The letter, addressed to Mayor R. L. Dade of Mer Rouge and "all good citizens," follows:

"You are wallowing in a cesspool of corruption and lawlessness that has become a menace to the entire parish and surrounding country. You are shielding within your gates men who live in open concubinage with negro women, who manufacture and sell whiskey, who formulate plots to assassinate good citizens in the nighttime and who are deluging the good, law-abiding citizens of your parish with written and oral threats against their lives. This condition of affairs must be rectified at once or we will swoop down upon your town and wipe out the organization that is responsible for these conditions and which are pleased to call themselves 'the anti-Ku Klux Klan.'

We know every one of the men who formulated and attempted to execute the plot to assassinate Dr. McKoin. Two of them have passed into obscurity and the balance will soon follow unless they read between these lines and leave your community while leaving is good."<sup>35</sup>

A second letter sent to Mayor Dade was posted in Monroe, Louisiana, about thirty miles from Mer Rouge, on September 11, 1922. This letter, signed by "a 100 percent American," stated:

"We have been reliably informed that there is an organization in your town which is called the Anti-Ku Klux Klan and which is responsible for the McKoin case. We will give you ample time to clean up. . . . And if you fail to do this we will bring one thousand men to Mer Rouge and do the job right. The names of the men who

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<sup>35</sup>The Times-Picayune, January 13, 1923.

sat at the round table and planned and submitted the planning to assassinate Dr. McKoin are known to us. We have had able men to get up all data. So now, we know all that was said and done and will attend to them in due time."<sup>36</sup>

During the period in which Morehouse Parish was referred to by Sheriff Carpenter as "in better condition as regards crime than it has ever been," there were attempts by citizens in various Morehouse communities to meet and prevent what might possibly develop into open hostility. A conference (usually referred to as a peace conference) was held in the directors' room of a Monroe bank. Both "Captain" S. K. Skipwith, Morehouse Exalted Cyclops, and Dr. B. M. McKoin, Captain of the Mer Rouge Klan, were present and demanded that as a condition of peace Hugo Davenport, A. C. Whipple, Thomas Milner, and City Marshall W. F. Campbell leave Mer Rouge and never return. A heated discussion followed this extreme demand and finally Skipwith and McKoin agreed that the men could remain in Mer Rouge on condition that they stop their outspoken criticism of the Klan. At this point the conference ended unsuccessfully. Davenport, Whipple, and Campbell remained in Mer Rouge and continued to denounce the Klan, but Thomas Milner voluntarily left the community.<sup>37</sup>

In view of the above information, it is not surprising that citizens of Mer Rouge not only approved, but in fact welcomed, the action of Governor Parker in stationing detachments of the Louisiana State National Guard in Morehouse Parish for a period of approximately

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., September 15, 1922.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., January 2, 1923.

one month.

### State Militia in Morehouse

State and federal investigators had conducted an investigation in Morehouse Parish during the months following the August 24 disappearance of Richards and Daniel. By the end of December, 1922, the investigators, basing their opinion on rumors, were convinced that the bodies had been hidden in a lake or bayou in Morehouse Parish. In view of this information, Governor Parker secured the services of a professional diver to search for the bodies and also made arrangements to safeguard the operation. According to Brigadier General Louis A. Toombs, Adjutant General of the state of Louisiana, "On December 19, 1922, Company "G", 156th Infantry, was ordered to Morehouse Parish for the purpose of guarding the apparatus and operations of the diver while engaged in their [his] work."<sup>38</sup>

Company "G" of the 156th Infantry, under the command of Captain W. W. Cooper, arrived in Mer Rouge on December 20, 1922. Two days later, this group was reinforced when Companies "A" and "D" of the same regiment were detached to Morehouse Parish under the command of Colonel Louis F. Guerre who, upon arrival, assumed command of all troops in Morehouse Parish. Then on January 2, 1923, the governor ordered additional troops of the 108th Cavalry to Morehouse Parish

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<sup>38</sup>"Morehouse Parish Open Hearing," Report of The Adjutant General of the State of Louisiana, For the Period July 1, 1923, to December 31, 1923, To The Governor And The General Assembly (New Orleans, 1923), 61.

and directed Brigadier General Toombs to assume personal command of all military personnel there.<sup>39</sup> These military detachments and others which the governor later ordered to the area remained on active duty at intervals from December 19, 1922, through January 23, 1923.

The original purpose of the state militia was to aid in the search for the two missing men, but the troops were eventually used to guard the parish jail and to insure the peaceful operation of the open hearing in Eastrop which lasted three weeks. The attitude of the citizens of Morehouse Parish toward the troops usually reflected a person's sympathy or hostility toward the Ku Klux Klan. The citizens of Mer Rouge were, for the most part, relieved when the troops arrived, but it was reported that a majority of the people of Eastrop believed that Governor Parker's action in ordering troops to Morehouse had been premature or unwarranted.<sup>40</sup> Sheriff Fred Carpenter, reportedly an officer of the Morehouse Klan, remarked after the withdrawal of the troops that "there is no need for troops here and in my mind there has never been."<sup>41</sup> It should be pointed out, however, that in the opinion of Captain Cooper, Sheriff Carpenter had shown a reluctance to cooperate in the investigation. In a telegram to Governor Parker dated December 21, 1922, Captain Cooper explained that "Sheriff Fred Carpenter has refused point blank to come to Mer

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>40</sup>The Times-Picayune, December 22, 1922.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., January 26, 1923.

Rouge at my request for a conference."<sup>42</sup> Upon receiving this information, Governor Parker felt compelled to send a telegram the same day to Sheriff Carpenter in which the Governor stated, "As chief executive of the state and in compliance with Section 14 of Article 5 of the Constitution, I hereby direct and instruct you to immediately go to Mer Rouge in your Parish and consult with Captain W. W. Cooper. . . . Acknowledge receipt of this telegram immediately and advise what action you will take in matter."<sup>43</sup>

The search for the two missing men centered around various lakes and bodies of water in Morehouse Parish. This was due to reports given the investigators that, on the night of the disappearance of Daniel and Richards, masked men had been seen in the vicinity of different bodies of water which offered the possibility that the abductors had examined different lakes for the purpose of finding a suitable place in which to dispose of the bodies.<sup>44</sup> Eventually, the investigators selected two lakes for immediate consideration. Cooper Lake, a shallow body of water about six miles north of Mer Rouge, was considered a likely grave for the men because of reports that Arkansas Klansmen had participated in the August 24 crime. If reports that Arkansas Klansmen were involved proved accurate, Cooper Lake was the logical place as it is located on a road leading toward

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<sup>42</sup>Cooper to Parker, quoted in The Times-Picayune, December 22, 1922.

<sup>43</sup>Parker to Carpenter, Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>The Times-Picayune, December 22, 1922.

Arkansas.<sup>45</sup> Lake Lafourche was also considered as a possible hiding place for the bodies due to reports that two iron wheels, said to have been from a log wagon, which for years had lain on the banks of the lake, had disappeared on the night of the kidnapping. It had also been reported that the men were taken in the direction of Lake Lafourche on the night of their disappearance.<sup>46</sup>

On December 21, 1922, the day after the arrival of the state militia in Mer Rouge, a search of Cooper Lake was begun with the aid of approximately twenty citizens of Mer Rouge. Due to the shallowness of Cooper Lake, a body of water about one-half mile long and ranging from two hundred to three hundred yards in width, the diver was not needed. Instead, a search party equipped with grappling hooks and rakes formed a line and waded through the water from bank to bank. This operation was repeated several times until the bottom of the lake had been thoroughly searched, although with no success.<sup>47</sup> Shortly after midnight on December 21, 1922, members of the state militia who had remained at Cooper Lake under the command of Lieutenant Percy saw what they believed to be lights in the lake. Thinking that someone had come to remove the bodies, the guards opened fire in the direction of the lights. Lieutenant Percy immediately sent two men to Mer Rouge to inform his superior, Captain Cooper, of the situation. When Captain Cooper arrived with additional men and

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<sup>45</sup>Rogers, op. cit., 35.

<sup>46</sup>The Times-Picayune, December 23, 1922.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., December 22, 1922.



assumed command, he was unable to locate any adversary and temporarily surmised that the incident had occurred due to overanxiousness and nervousness of the men on guard. The next morning, however, other developments led to the idea that the incident at Cooper Lake had been designed to divert the attention of the state militia so that another mission could be accomplished. It was never proved that men associated with the kidnapping had actually created the incident at Cooper Lake and it may have been only a coincidence. But in the light of future developments, a very unusual coincidence, for on the morning of December 22, 1922, while Captain Cooper's men were still at Cooper Lake, a message was received in Mer Rouge from J. C. Nettles of Oak Ridge, Louisiana, which stated that two bodies were floating in Lake Lafourche. The discovery had been made by Nettles when he went to the lake early that morning to fish.<sup>48</sup>

Shortly after midnight on the morning of December 22, 1922, a dynamite explosion occurred at Eason Ferry on Lake Lafourche approximately sixteen miles south of Mer Rouge. Residents of the vicinity were startled and terrified by the blast which was later described by investigators as having been caused by not less than one thousand pounds of dynamite. The explosion ripped away a large portion of bank at the west landing of the ferry and sent it into the lake. The explosion and the resulting appearance of the bodies led to a widely accepted theory that the persons responsible for the disappearance of Daniel and Richards had attempted to conceal the bodies

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., December 23, 1922.

with earth from the banks of the lake but had only succeeded in breaking the bodies from their mooring. The fact that both bodies had hay-baling wire attached seemed to substantiate the theory. A diver went down several times from the ferry in an attempt to locate additional evidence but was thwarted in his attempt due to the condition of the lake bottom.<sup>49</sup>

Word that the bodies had been found immediately brought both official investigators and local residents to the scene. Captain Cooper was notified at approximately 7 o'clock in the morning and immediately drove to the lake and placed a guard at the scene until such time as the bodies could be removed. Dr. C. M. Patterson, Morehouse Parish Coroner, was notified and after viewing the bodies turned them over to A. E. Farland, Agent of the United States Department of Justice, who was in charge of investigating the disappearance of the two men.<sup>50</sup> The two bodies were placed in metallic caskets and brought to Mer Rouge where they were placed in a vacant storeroom of the Masonic Hall. A detachment of troops assigned to guard the bodies remained on constant duty until the time of burial.<sup>51</sup>

An autopsy was performed on the two bodies the day they were recovered from the lake. Doctor Charles W. Duval and Doctor John A. Lanford, both of New Orleans, performed the examination and submitted the autopsy report. Following the examination, the bodies

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

were taken to the home of Harry I. Gibson of Mer Rouge. The bodies remained in the Gibson home until the afternoon of December 24, 1922, at which time they were taken to the Daniel's family burial plot which was described as atop a wooded hill on the banks of the Bonnee Idee Bayou. Following the services which were conducted by the Reverend E. W. Hayward, pastor of Grace Episcopal Church of Monroe, the two bodies were lowered into their graves a few feet apart. The service was closed by a salute of three guns fired by soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Randolph H. Percy and the playing of Taps.<sup>52</sup>

### Jeff Burnett

Immediately after the discovery of the bodies, Governor Parker was asked what action would be taken by the state. His answer was that the attorney general and his assistants would announce the official plan of action of the state. The state's plans were soon revealed in a statement issued by Attorney General A. V. Coco in which he said:

"We are going to Mer Rouge to make a personal investigation relative to the finding of the two bodies there. We will investigate all available facts in regard to the Mer Rouge outrages, and the autopsy of the bodies will be made by Dr. Duval and Dr. Lanford.

Dr. Lanford, pathologist at Touro Infirmary, and Dr. Duval, Professor of Pathology at Tulane University, should be able to give us some vital information after their examinations of the bodies that have been recovered from the lake.

We mean to make every possible effort to determine the manner in which these two lake victims came to their death, and I am confident that public sentiment

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., December 25, 1923.

will be with us. In fact, I believe that the people as a whole are thoroughly in sympathy with us in our desire to ferret out the facts of the crime and to bring the guilty persons to justice.

The crime has been a blot on the record of the state, and there are many good citizens, members of the Ku Klux Klan among them, who not only agree with us in this position, but who, I am sure, will assist the prosecution in every way."<sup>53</sup>

Attorney General Coco, T. Hernes Walmesley, Assistant Attorney General, and two companies of the 156th Infantry arrived in Bastrop by train on December 23, 1922. Attorney General Coco immediately issued an affidavit calling for the arrest of T. J. (Jeff) Burnett on the charge of murder. Burnett, an employee of a carbon plant located approximately two miles south of Bastrop, was immediately placed under arrest by Sheriff Fred Carpenter of Morehouse Parish. The suspect was confined to the Bastrop jail which was now under constant guard by members of the state militia who were equipped with machine guns.<sup>54</sup>

Two days later, December 25, 1922, Jeff Burnett in his first interview with newspaper reporters stated, "I am innocent and will prove it when the time comes. . . . I don't know why I have been singled out when I know nothing of the murders [with] which I am charged."<sup>55</sup> Burnett further stated that he was not and never had been a member of the Klan. When asked his opinion of whether or not the Klan was responsible for the death of Daniel and Richards,

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., December 23, 1922.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., December 24, 1922.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., December 26, 1922.

Burnett answered no. He also furnished an alibi by stating, "On the night of August 24, when Richards and Daniel were killed, I was nowhere in the vicinity in which they were kidnapped. I am an employee of the Southern Carbon Company at Spyker. On that night I was working as engineer and did not hear of the deaths of the two men until a day or two later."<sup>56</sup> Jeff Burnett remained in the Bastrop jail until January 6, 1923, when he was rushed to a Shreveport hospital under guard of a Morehouse Parish deputy sheriff after Burnett had contracted pneumonia.<sup>57</sup>

#### Dr. B. M. McKoin Incident

Dr. B. M. McKoin, former mayor of Mer Rouge, who had practiced his profession in that town for approximately nine years, was a central figure in the case involving the deaths of Richards and Daniel. According to widespread belief in Mer Rouge, the August 2, 1922, attempt on Dr. McKoin's life had served as a motive for the deaths of Richards and Daniel three weeks later. "Captain" S. K. Skipwith, Exalted Cyclops of the Morehouse Klan, expressed a similar opinion in an open letter to Governor Parker in which Skipwith observed that "the kidnapping of Daniel and Richards by the friends of Dr. McKoin was the result of the diabolical attempt to assassinate him."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., January 7, 1923.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., September 12, 1922.

Soon after the August 2, 1922, attempt on his life, either real or imaginary, Dr. McKoin left Mer Rouge and took up residence in Monroe in the adjoining parish of Ouachita. McKoin remained in Monroe until the first part of October at which time he traveled to Baltimore, Maryland, where he enrolled in postgraduate work at Johns Hopkins Hospital. On December 26, 1922, Dr. McKoin was arrested and jailed by police officials following a telegram from Governor Parker in which he had requested such action. The telegram made no mention of charges but merely requested that Maryland officials arrest Dr. McKoin and that the prisoner be held for Louisiana authorities. On the day following his arrest, Dr. McKoin made statements in which he said that he was not a member of the Klan nor had he been asked to join the organization. McKoin continued by stating, "In fairness to them [Ku Klux Klan], however, . . . I must say they have done much good work in the matter of ridding Mer Rouge of undesirables."<sup>59</sup> When asked to cite a particular case, Dr. McKoin replied, "I know dozens of them but I do not care to talk about the activities at this time."<sup>60</sup> When questioned about the possibility of his returning to Louisiana, McKoin stated that he would resist any attempts of the Louisiana officials to extradite him. McKoin stated that he "would rather die forty times than be taken back. . . . The sight of me would be the signal for the greatest slaughter of human life this country has ever known. . . . I wouldn't live long enough to smell

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.. December 28, 1922.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

the smoke."<sup>61</sup>

The state of Louisiana immediately began legal action for the extradition of Dr. McKoin. On December 28, 1922, Deputy Sheriff L. E. Calhoun of Morehouse Parish and Captain of Detectives James F. Glynn of the New Orleans Police Department left New Orleans en route to Baltimore to escort Dr. McKoin back to Louisiana in the event his extradition were granted. The two Louisiana officials arrived in Baltimore on December 31, 1922, with the necessary papers asking the governor of Maryland for his approval so as to enable them to return Dr. McKoin to Louisiana.<sup>62</sup> After examining the papers which requested the extradition of McKoin, Governor Ritchie refused and in a telegram to Governor Parker dated January 2, 1923, explained his refusal thus: "After examining the requisition papers in the McKoin case I do not think they are sufficient for the reason that the affidavits are made on information and belief and not by any one who has any personal knowledge of the alleged crime." Governor Ritchie further informed Parker that "Dr. McKoin, while insisting on his extradition rights, nevertheless . . . is quite willing to return to Louisiana voluntarily, but he cannot do so until he is released by the court. He would like your deputy officers to accompany him back to Louisiana, and will you authorize your deputy officer to accompany him there?"<sup>63</sup> Governor Parker approved McKoin's release on condition that he return to

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., December 30, 1922.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., January 4, 1923.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., January 3, 1923.

Louisiana with Deputy Sheriff Calhoun and New Orleans Detective Glynn. McKoin accepted the conditions and left Baltimore on January 3, 1923, in the company of the two officials from Louisiana.<sup>64</sup>

On January 5, 1923, at 5:30 in the afternoon, Dr. McKoin arrived in Eastrop and went directly to the office of Sheriff Carpenter. Judge Fred M. Odom fixed bond at five thousand dollars. The bond was signed by Dr. B. E. Barham of Oak Ridge, and Dr. McKoin then left Eastrop at approximately 7 o'clock bound for Monroe where his family was residing.<sup>65</sup>

There were many friends and associates of Dr. McKoin who not only expressed belief in his innocence but also offered him whatever assistance they could. Physicians of the Louisiana Fifth Congressional District Medical Association, of which Dr. McKoin was a past president, sent word to Dr. McKoin that they were prepared to raise enough money for his defense if he should require financial aid. This action was not taken as an official action of the Medical Association but suggested the possibility of private donations from physicians in the Association.<sup>66</sup> Other expressions of sympathy came from various religious organizations in Monroe, Louisiana, where McKoin had lived prior to his departure for Baltimore. The First Baptist Church of Monroe, of which McKoin was a member, passed a resolution on January 7, 1923, which was prepared by the pastor, Frank Tripp,

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., January 4, 1923.

<sup>65</sup>The Shreveport Journal, January 6, 1923.

<sup>66</sup>The Times-Picayune, December 28, 1922.



and which expressed the congregation's belief in McKoin's innocence. The following day, January 8, 1923, the Twin Cities Ministerial Association, composed of pastors of the Protestant churches of Monroe and West Monroe, adopted a similar resolution.<sup>67</sup>

There were many in Mer Rouge who placed no credence in McKoin's protestations of innocence. When word reached Mer Rouge that McKoin denied having been a member of the Klan, several Klansmen and former members of the organization told newspaper reporters that McKoin was not only a member but had been the leader of the chapter in Mer Rouge. One man stated that he had been present the night McKoin was initiated into the Klan, and was one of seven men who went to McKoin to obtain his application for membership. Another citizen of Mer Rouge, reflecting on McKoin's character, stated:

"They say those two men who were killed were of a lawless type. This much is true, at least, they have never been guilty of taking a human life. Had I known that Dr. McKoin had ever killed a man I would not have asked him to join the organization. [Dr. McKoin had mortally wounded Dr. K. P. Thom on August 12, 1916.] In my estimation, judged on Dr. McKoin's records and what I saw of his action in these two raids [referring to two Klan raids in which the speaker accompanied McKoin], Dr. McKoin is not one whit better than the two men who were murdered."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., January 9, 1923.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., December 30, 1922.

## CHAPTER IV

### MOREHOUSE OPEN HEARING, JANUARY 5-25, 1923

Attorney General Coco in his statement of December 22, 1922, explained that it was his intention to conduct an investigation in order to examine all available information pertaining to the "Mer Rouge outrages." The following day, the day of Coco's arrival in Morehouse Parish, Judge Fred M. Edom of the Sixth Judicial District ordered a public hearing on the case. The hearing was scheduled to begin on January 5, 1923, and was to be held at the Morehouse Parish Courthouse located in Ruston, Louisiana. Judge Edom took this action following receipt of a petition signed by Attorney General Coco, Assistant Attorneys General George S. Guion and T. Semmes Walmsley, District Attorney David Garret, and St. Claire Adams, Special Attorney for the Prosecution.<sup>1</sup>

One day prior to the opening of the hearing, the state's special prosecutor, St. Claire Adams, withdrew from all participation in the case. The attorney general explained this situation to newsmen by stating, "Mr. Adams, who was appointed by me as Special Prosecutor, has retired . . . because he and I were unable to agree on a policy of management. We quit good friends. . . . Mr. Adams' opinion and

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<sup>1</sup>The Times-Picayune, December 24, 1922.

mine didn't harmonize, therefore he decided to withdraw."<sup>2</sup> State Senator Howard E. Warren was selected to replace Adams. One factor which led to the selection of Warren was the fact that during the period from 1912 until 1920 Senator Warren had served as district attorney for the Fourth Judicial District and during this time had had experience in conducting a similar hearing.

On January 5, 1923, Bastrop, the site of the hearing which was to last for twenty-one days and capture the attention of the entire nation, was crowded with local citizens, visitors from other areas of the country, and representatives of various news media. Judge Odom's first action in opening the hearing was to call Sheriff Carpenter to the stand. Judge Odom began by pointing out to Sheriff Carpenter that it was his responsibility to see that "perfect order is maintained in this courtroom." Odom continued that it was his intention to allow complete access to the hearing to all who wished to attend, and was explicit in stating that he would permit no interference with the order or procedure of the Court. He remarked, "If it should come to me at any time during this hearing . . . that any person or group of persons have attempted or are attempting to frighten, intimidate, or in any manner interfere with any witness either before or after he has testified, I am going to have the parties implicated, arrested, and incarcerated at once."<sup>3</sup> Judge Odom stated that in his opinion the sheriff and his deputies were quite capable

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.. January 4, 1923.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.. January 6, 1923.

of handling any situation which might arise but referred to the Louisiana State National Guard units by remarking, ". . . these troops are here, and in order that the people may be reassured, I will state that they are subject to the order of the Court and I shall not hesitate to call them in to protect citizens or to aid the Sheriff in the discharge of his duties if any emergency should arise."<sup>4</sup> At the conclusion of Judge Odom's opening remarks, which were directed to Sheriff Carpenter but had the effect of serving as a message to the residents of Morehouse Parish, the Court was adjourned until two o'clock. The early recess came as a surprise to many but was probably intended to allow certain spectators to disarm themselves as Judge Odom had announced that anyone in Eastrop or Mer Rouge found carrying a concealed weapon would be jailed for the duration of the hearing.

When Court was resumed deputy sheriffs were stationed at the entrances to the Courthouse to see that no one with firearms entered. A. E. Farland, District Chief of the Department of Justice, protested when a deputy sheriff insisted in disarming Farland as he entered the courtroom to testify. The deputy was firm, however, and Farland finally consented. That evening Farland reported the incident to his superiors in Washington and a reply came from Washington that unless federal agents were allowed to carry their weapons, assistance would be given the agents, perhaps in the form of federal troops. Following news of this development, Judge Odom issued the following statement: "I have subsequently modified this order so as to permit the

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

special agents of the Government to remain armed while in the courtroom not because I think they are in danger but for a reason which I think is good."<sup>5</sup>

The first witness called to testify in the hearing was John C. Nettles, a commercial fisherman who resided in Oak Ridge. Nettles, one of the first to reach the spot where the explosion had occurred, explained that upon his arrival, "I looked down and there I saw Matt Daniel's body floating in the lake [Lafourche]. I looked a little further and saw the other body, about fifteen feet out."<sup>6</sup> Nettles also mentioned that on the night before the dynamiting a chain on a boat had been cut with a hacksaw and the boat had been used both that night and the night of the explosion. James Ellington, a Negro ferryman, had found a hacksaw and a set of keys on the bank of the lake. Ellington had turned the keys over to Nettles who in turn gave them to Captain Cooper.<sup>7</sup>

The next witness of importance was Assistant Attorney General T. S. Walmsley who was present when the autopsy was performed. Walmsley presented to the Court several items of identification which had been taken from the bodies including a badly damaged watch bearing the inscription "J. L. Daniel, Mer Rouge," a black necktie with the initials "T. W. D.," and a badly damaged five dollar bill. J. L. Daniel was called to the stand to identify the articles. When asked

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., January 7, 1923.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., January 6, 1923.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

to identify the watch, Daniel answered in a low voice, "This watch is one I bought in Monroe and had my name inscribed on it. I gave it to my boy during the war."<sup>8</sup> Farland testified that on December 22, 1922, he cut a piece of clothing from the second body, presumably that of Richards, for the purpose of identification. McIlwain, a merchant in Mer Rouge, examined the cloth and testified that Richards had ordered a suit of similar cloth through him which had been made by a Cincinnati firm. McIlwain also presented an order for the suit signed by Richards. Following the testimony of McIlwain, the Court was adjourned for the day, and it was apparent that the state had used the opening day in an attempt to prove positively the identity of the two bodies.<sup>9</sup>

The hearing opened on January 6, 1923, with the testimony of Dr. Charles W. Duval, New Orleans pathologist. Dr. Duval explained that after performing approximately six thousand autopsies during his professional career, he had never had a case in which the subject had been so brutally tortured: "In all my medical experience . . . I have had nothing to equal it. I have read nothing in literature to parallel it." When asked to give his opinion as to what mechanism or device had been used on the two men, Dr. Duval replied, "It was some kind of press that gave force from each side. . . . It could not have been flat, in the order of a letter press, as some of the old torture instruments of the barbaric ages were. The peculiar manner in which the bones were broken with mathematical precision showed

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

that."<sup>10</sup>

Following the testimony of the pathologist, W. C. Andrews was called to the stand. Andrews, one of the five men kidnapped on August 24, 1922, gave his story of what had occurred that evening. When asked if he had recognized any of his kidnappers, Andrews replied, "I don't know who the men were, but I believe they were members of the Ku Klux Klan." Then J. L. Daniel, father of one of the murdered men, explained the incident which occurred on August 24. Daniel also testified that he was unable to identify any of his assailants.<sup>11</sup>

For the next few days the state produced one witness after another who related incidents of mob activity which had occurred in Morehouse Parish prior to the kidnapping of the five men on August 24, 1922. Persons who had been kidnapped, those who had been beaten or otherwise mistreated, and those who had left the parish after receiving warnings all testified at the hearing. Some were able to name one or more of their assailants while others were not able to make any positive identification. These incidents resulted in the following statement by Attorney General Coco at the close of the hearing:

"The proof is convincing that since the advent of the Ku Klux Klan in this parish [Morehouse] there has gradually arisen a condition of disorder and lawlessness which has ripened into a supersession of constituted authority by the Ku Klux Klan and the establishment of a government, of its own, from which a reign of terror and chaos has resulted, and the parish was on the brink of riot and bloodshed when the government sent the militia here and these proceedings were

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., January 7, 1923.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

initiated."<sup>12</sup>

On January 18, 1923, after the hearing had been in progress for approximately two weeks, the first positive identification was made of a member of the mob which had kidnapped the five Mer Rouge citizens. E. N. (Newt) Gray, the first person identified as having been a member of the black-robed mob, had attended the Mastrop ballgame on August 24. Gray met Rufus Lubanks, an eighteen-year-old youth, at the game and asked Lubanks to drive his automobile to his home. Before taking Gray's automobile to his home, Lubanks testified that he drove Gray to the Mastrop Road and left him within two hundred yards of the scene of the kidnapping which occurred shortly afterwards. Lubanks further testified that Gray had told him that he wished to meet Tom Higginbotham and it was for this purpose that he waited along the road. Lubanks, continuing his testimony, stated that as he was returning Gray's automobile to his home as requested, he met several automobiles occupied by masked men. He also recalled having met Thomas Higginbotham and stated that he was positive that Higginbotham was the only person in the car.<sup>13</sup> The next day another witness, Fred Hedding, also testified that he had seen Thomas Higginbotham alone in his automobile on the evening of August 24. These statements were considered important as Newt Gray asserted that on the evening in question he had been riding with Higginbotham in his

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., January 26, 1923.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., January 19, 1923.



automobile.<sup>14</sup>

Fred Lubanks, brother-in-law of Newt Gray, stated that on August 24, he was riding in one of the vehicles which was stopped on the Bastrop-Mer Rouge highway by the group of black-hooded men. When asked if he had been able to recognize any of the men, Lubanks replied, "Yes . . . I recognized one." When asked to identify this person, his reply was, "Newt Gray."<sup>15</sup> Mrs. J. H. Inabet of Mer Rouge was later called to the witness stand and she retold the story of the August 24 kidnapping. Mrs. Inabet, who was in the same car with Miss Thelma Dade, granddaughter of J. L. Daniel and niece of Matt Daniel, explained that seven or eight of the hooded men came within reach of their automobile and one of the men "had the piece between the eyes of his mask torn out till you could see his features plainly." When the witness was asked to identify this person, she first replied, "Well, I don't like to say; we've been friends of the family." The question was then repeated and Mrs. Inabet replied, "I recognized Mr. Newt Gray."<sup>16</sup>

The second person to be identified as a member of the group of masked men was T. J. (Jeff) Burnett. On January 16, 1923, F. L. Whetstone was called to the witness stand. Whetstone, whose home was in Oak Ridge, told the Court of his attendance at the festivities in Bastrop but added that he had left during the tenth inning.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., January 20, 1923.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., January 19, 1923.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., January 20, 1923.

of the second ballgame. The witness testified that he was walking in the direction of Mer Rouge and, when he had gone about one-and-one-half miles, saw a truck occupied by black-hooded men. Thinking that perhaps the men were hijackers, he attempted to hurry by the vehicle but was stopped when one of the men whistled and called him by name. One of the men approached Whetstone, told him to get water for the group, and offered him fifty cents for the task. The witness refused the money but brought the water after being told where he might obtain it.

Whetstone was then released and he continued walking down the road in the direction of Mer Rouge and was again stopped by other hooded men. Once more he performed the duty of getting water for the group. When he returned with the water he found several automobiles parked on the road. The group forced Whetstone to remain there for approximately forty minutes and during this time the witness overheard one of the men remark that they had what they wanted and named the five men who were kidnapped, two of whom never returned alive. When asked if he were able to recognize anyone in the mob, Whetstone replied, "Yes, T. J. Burnett." Whetstone was then asked if he were positive of this identification and he replied, "Yes, Sir: his mask was lifted and I could see him plainly." The witness continued that he had known Burnett all his life as their mothers were first cousins. The witness also testified that Burnett had looked at him and smiled, a smile which the witness interpreted as an indication Burnett

realized he had been recognized.<sup>17</sup> A few days after the kidnapping, Mrs. Sallie Whetstone, sister-in-law of R. A. Whetstone, was stopped by Gus Calhoun who asked about Whetstone and advised Mrs. Whetstone to tell her brother-in-law to keep his mouth shut.<sup>18</sup>

Another witness who testified before the Court as to the identity of T. J. Burnett was Mrs. B. D. Carlisle, a resident of Bastrop. Mrs. Carlisle stated that about 4 o'clock on the afternoon of August 24, 1922, she and her husband and three children were traveling on the Bastrop-Mer Rouge Road when they were stopped by a group of hooded men. Mrs. Carlisle stated that they were traveling in a carriage and when they were stopped their horses became tangled in a telegraph wire which was in the road. When asked if she recognized Jeff Burnett in the group, Mrs. Carlisle answered, "Yes Sir; he freed the horses after they walked into the wire."<sup>19</sup> Mrs. Carlisle also testified that after the kidnapping she was asked by an employee of a blacksmith shop in Bastrop, a man she knew only as a "Mr. Smith," if she recognized him on the day of the kidnapping. When Mrs. Carlisle replied affirmatively, Smith asked her not to say anything about the affair and offered her a dollar-and-a-half. Mrs. Carlisle told him that she didn't want the money and he gave it to her child who was with her at the time.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., January 23, 1923.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., January 21, 1923.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

Jeff Burnett was never called as a witness due to his physical condition. Shortly after his arrest on December 23, 1922, Burnett had contracted pneumonia and was confined to a Shreveport hospital. It was widely speculated that Burnett's attorney would probably have objected to Burnett's testifying on the grounds that his testimony might have been self-incriminating. Burnett had made a statement to newspapermen soon after his arrest and had supplied himself with an alibi for August 24, 1922. Burnett stated that on the night in which Daniel and Richards were killed, he had been on duty at a carbon plant at Spyker. An important witness who could substantiate or destroy this alibi was Harold L. Teegestrom, a nineteen-year-old book-keeper at the Spyker Carbon Plant. Teegestrom and Burnett were friends, and shortly after the arrest of Jeff Burnett, Teegestrom had told a newspaper reporter that Burnett was working on the night of August 24. When Teegestrom was later questioned by government agents it was reported that his story now differed from the original.<sup>21</sup> Thus it was apparent that Teegestrom's testimony would be of utmost importance--particularly as his duties at the carbon plant included keeping a record of the hours worked by each employee.

On Friday, December 29, 1922, approximately one week prior to the opening of the hearing, one of the most unusual incidents of a very unusual case occurred. Harold L. Teegestrom, the one person who was in a position to testify conclusively as to Burnett's whereabouts on August 24, 1922, mysteriously disappeared. Rumors and

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., January 25, 1923.

speculation as to the whereabouts of the lookkeeper depended upon the individual's attitude toward the Klan. The anti-Klan belief was that Teegestrom had been kidnapped by Klan members in an attempt to prevent his being called to the witness stand during the approaching hearing. Members of the Klan were equally emphatic in expressing the idea that the responsibility for Teegestrom's disappearance rested with the federal agents.<sup>22</sup>

During the month following Teegestrom's disappearance, various measures were taken to locate the elusive witness. On January 22, 1923, near the close of the hearing, information reached the investigators that Teegestrom was not out of the state as some believed but was staying with friends near Eastrop. Acting upon this information, search warrants were obtained for the homes of Henry Jones and his father, Rufus Jones, which were located approximately one-and-one-half miles from Eastrop. T. Sennies Walmeley, Assistant Attorney General, and two Morehouse Parish deputy sheriffs, with the aid of sixteen members of a cavalry unit of the Louisiana National Guard under the command of Major E. Roy, searched the two homes but were unable to locate the missing witness.<sup>23</sup>

During the hearing, Harold Teegestrom's brother Clarence was called to testify. Clarence testified that he had received a letter from his brother on January 10, 1923, two weeks after his disappearance. He further stated that he not only had failed to notify

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., January 23, 1923.

authorities as he had promised, but had also destroyed the letter. If this statement came as a surprise to the state's attorneys, it was nothing to compare with the astonishment of the investigators when Clarence stated that he was a member of the Ku Klux Klan and had joined the organization in the first part of January, 1923, a few days following the disappearance of his brother.<sup>24</sup>

Although Harold Teegestrom never appeared at the open hearing, the Time Book and other records of the Southern Carbon Company were brought into Court as evidence by the state. H. H. Riordan, General Manager of the Monroe District of the Southern Carbon Company, testified on January 24, 1923, concerning the accuracy of the company records. When shown the company records, Riordan testified that they were the records which he had received on January 2, 1923, from S. I. Bennett, Superintendent of the Spyker plant. Riordan stated that the Time Books were in Teegestrom's handwriting and that it was his job to keep the Time Book at Spyker. When asked if he could explain an obvious erasure mark on August 24, 1922, the witness stated that he could not. Senator Warren continued his questioning by pointing out that if Jeff Burnett had in fact worked on the night of August 24 as the erased entry indicated, there was a discrepancy elsewhere. A close examination of the payroll and cancelled checks revealed that Jeff Burnett's salary for the month of August was incorrect if the Time Book was accurate. Riordan, when confronted with this evidence, admitted that the amount paid Burnett, as shown by the payroll and

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., January 24, 1923.

cancelled check, did not correspond with the amount which was due Burnett as indicated by the obviously erased Time Book which had been kept by Harold Teegestrom.<sup>25</sup>

Another link between the murders of the two men and an employee of the Spyker Carbon Plant was the fact that one of a group of keys, which had been found at the scene of the dynamiting at Lake Lafourche where the two bodies were found, was a key to a meter house at the Spyker plant. S. I. Bennett, when questioned regarding the key, stated that the key which fit the meter house was apparently lost by a Negro employee, Sam Harris, who had been discharged by the company several months previously. Bennett stated that Harris had lost the key in a flood eight months before and it had never been recovered. T. Sommes Walmsley later stated that the keys found at the scene of the dynamiting could not have been those lost by Harris as the keys were found some seventeen miles from the area in which Harris had lost his keys. Walmsley also remarked that it was believed that the dynamite had been obtained at the carbon plant and that much of the murder plot had been planned at Spyker and carried out by men who lived there. Bennett was not questioned as to his connection with the Ku Klux Klan although he had informed the state's attorney of his membership in the Klan prior to his taking the witness stand.<sup>26</sup>

Harold Teegestrom, who had mysteriously disappeared one week prior to the open hearing, reappeared with equal mystery on January 29,

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., January 25, 1923.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., January 23, 1923.

1923, four days after the hearing closed. Teegestrom, who was immediately placed under a five hundred dollar appearance bond by the Court, was offered his old job by Bennett. Teegestrom explained his disappearance thus:

"I was not forced to leave. . . . About 11 o'clock the evening of December 29 a number of persons came to see me at Spyker in an automobile. They said they would give me all the time I wanted to get on my clothes and go with them. I put them on and liked. I did not go to the men but wandered around in the woods all night. They were Department of Justice men, I was told. I do not know what became of them. I was not interested in them after I made my getaway."<sup>27</sup>

Teegestrom said that on December 30, 1922, he caught a train for El Dorado, Arkansas, and spent several days in the oil fields in that area. From Arkansas, he returned to Alexandria, Louisiana, and from there, to Baton Rouge where he remained five days. When asked why he voluntarily chose to leave Morehouse Parish, Teegestrom replied, "I thought it best to let Mr. Jeff testify. I did not want to injure him or anybody else, but I want to do the right thing. I was not frightened away. I was not kidnapped, but I left because I felt I was doing the right thing."<sup>28</sup>

There can be little question as to whether or not the state's investigators believed that Teegestrom had done "the right thing." They expressed the belief that not only had he remained in Morehouse Parish for the period in question but that the Morehouse Klan had known of his whereabouts and had in fact hidden the young man until

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., January 30, 1923.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.



the hearing closed.<sup>29</sup> Over a month later, March 8, 1923, Harold Teegstrom did appear before the Morehouse Parish grand jury. Any statement he might have made to this group was not revealed for publication.

For the remainder of the hearing, the attorney general and his assistants produced as many witnesses as possible for the purpose of gaining enough information so that the Morehouse Parish grand jury would issue an indictment. On January 21, 1923, Attorney General Coco issued the following statement, after conferring with Governor Parker:

"The state has proven that the Ku Klux Klan had established a super-government in Morehouse Parish, that S. W. Skipwith, exalted cyclops of the Klan, was an absolute czar who made the laws to suit himself, acted as judge over those accused of violating his edicts, and passed sentence upon offenders. . . . The state's case is clear, I believe all the hooded outrages committed in Morehouse Parish may be justly attributed to the Ku Klux Klan as an organization under the direction of Skipwith as leader."<sup>30</sup>

Following this statement, the attorney general continued the hearing for three days. H. E. Blankenship, a citizen of Eastrop, reported that on the evening of August 24 he was sitting on the porch of his home located one block from the Courthouse, when he saw pass fifty feet in front of him a group of cars and one truck driven by black-hooded men. Blankenship was able to recognize Daniel who was sitting down in the truck and appeared to have his hands tied behind

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid... January 22, 1923.

him. The witness stated that he was unable to obtain the license number of the vehicle at the time, but the next morning he found the truck, which he was able to identify by "marks and scratches," and copied the number--74657. A statement from the Motor Vehicle Bureau at Baton Rouge revealed that license number 74657 had been issued to F. Smith Stevenson of Iastrop, Louisiana. When asked if he were able to identify any of the masked men, Blankenship answered that he thought he had recognized Smith Stevenson and Oliver Skipwith, son of S. K. Skipwith. When questioned as to his certainty of the identification, Blankenship replied, "So sure that if my brother had been there Skipwith and Stevenson would have been the first men I would have looked for."<sup>31</sup>

Fuckett Mason of Gallion testified from the witness stand that on August 24, 1922, he had seen Daniel, Richards, and "Tot" Davenport sitting together on the Courthouse steps. A short distance away, "Captain" Skipwith and a group of men seemed to be discussing the three as Skipwith frequently pointed in their direction. Ray Broadnax related much the same story and mentioned the fact that Skipwith frequently pointed in the direction of the three men, all of whom were kidnapped later and two of whom never returned.<sup>32</sup> The last witness for the state, Lawrence Leon Jones, took the stand on January 25, 1923, and related the story of what he and his family had seen near Lake Lafourche at approximately midnight on August 24, 1922.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., January 21, 1923.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., January 24, 1923.

Thus the last witness of the three week open hearing into the deaths of Watt Daniel and Thomas Richards was probably the last person, other than the kidnappers, to have seen the two men alive.

In closing the hearing which had lasted for three weeks and had received the attention of the entire nation, Attorney General Cocco read the following statement on January 25, 1923:

"May it please the court.

The state has decided to discontinue these proceedings, for the present at least, and until such time as conditions may justify their resumption. The hope is expressed, however, that this may not become necessary.

Before taking our leave of Your Honor and of this Parish, I desire to express my gratification at the orderly and dignified manner in which these proceedings have been conducted, and my pleasure in the assistance we have received from the officers in obtaining the prompt attention of our witnesses and in preserving order.

On the other hand, it is my very painful and humiliating duty to refer to the deplorable conditions in this Parish, as revealed by the evidence. The proof is convincing that since the advent of the Ku Klux Klan in the Parish there has gradually arisen a condition of disorder and lawlessness which has ripened into a supercession of constituted authorities by the Ku Klux Klan and the establishment of a government, of its own, from which a reign of terror and chaos has resulted, and the Parish was on the brink of riot and blood-shed when the Governor sent the militia here and these proceedings were initiated.

While it may be conceded that many Klansmen did not actually participate or encourage these many acts of lawlessness and crime, which finally culminated in the murder of Watt Daniel and T. F. Richards, they may nevertheless be deemed responsible therefore by reason of their silence and inaction. These offenses and crimes were committed in the name of the order, under the protection of its regalia and in the use of its recognized methods and practices, and under the leadership of its officers, the principal of which has, for the last six months at least, brought about a condition in this Parish which is a blot upon our civilization and brings into question the proud title of American citizenship.

The flogging of citizens, their deportation and banishment and other kindred offenses, were mere pastimes

and of such frequent occurrence that they were accepted as commonplace things, the protest against which was itself sufficient grounds for deportation.

Without going into detail, we beg to say that the conclusion we have reached is that many persons have been identified and connected with these many acts of violence and crime, leading to and including the kidnapping of August 24, 1922, and the murder of Matt Daniel and T. F. Richards, and it is the purpose of the State to present this evidence to the Grand Jury for its consideration and action as soon as we get a transcript of it."<sup>33</sup>

January 25, 1923, was also the day on which the state militia was relieved of duty in Morehouse Parish. At noon on that date all troops were officially dismissed by order of General L. A. Toombs, Adjutant General of the state of Louisiana. General Toombs issued a statement in which he said that he had been instructed by the governor to use his own discretion as to the advisability of retaining troops in Morehouse Parish after the hearing was closed. After careful investigation, Toombs was of the opinion that the presence of troops was no longer necessary for proper maintenance of law and order. Toombs warned the citizens of Morehouse Parish that he had been directed by the governor to announce that "should there be a recurrence of disorder in the Parish and should the civil authorities fail to maintain order, he [the governor] will have the troops returned, and declare martial law."<sup>34</sup>

The departure of the militiamen who had come to Morehouse Parish on December 20, 1922, was met with mixed reaction. In Mer Rouge,

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., January 26, 1923.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., January 25, 1923.

many were very apprehensive and believed that their departure would signal an attack by the Klan upon certain citizens of that community. Although the adjutant general had stated, "Sheriff Fred Carpenter has informed me that he is determined to put a stop to any further disorders, and I believe that he will do it,"<sup>35</sup> there is little doubt that there were many in Mer Rouge who were not equally reassured by the sheriff's statement. Mayor Robert L. Dade of Mer Rouge was quoted as having said, "Promises have been made, but this does not change the situation. There is an undercurrent that indicates that it would be advisable to give protection to all of the State's witnesses until after the Morehouse Parish Grand Jury holds its session."<sup>36</sup>

The people of Eastrop seemed to be of divided opinion in regard to removal of the troops. Although the town had been overwhelmingly opposed to this semblance of martial law, the soldiers had made many friends during their weeks in Eastrop and local businessmen had undoubtedly profitted from their presence. In referring to the withdrawal of the troops Sheriff Carpenter said, "The law will be upheld here and night raids and kidnapping will not be tolerated. [It is revealing to note that Alonzo Braddock had been taken from his home at 2 o'clock in the morning approximately one year before by a hooded mob led by "Captain" Skipwith and Sheriff Carpenter had testified that Skipwith and his men had been deputized.] There is

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., January 26, 1923.

no need for troops here and in my mind there has never been."<sup>37</sup>

### Grand Jury Report

Following the close of the hearing in Eastrop which, according to Attorney General Coco, had served to bring certain evidence to the Morehouse Parish grand jury, there were few if any acts of violence similar to those which had plagued the parish in the preceding year. This was perhaps due to the fact that those persons who in the past had committed hostile acts were concerned about the statement of the adjutant general that troops would be brought back into the parish if necessary. On the other hand, the cessation of mob activity might be interpreted as a response to an ultimatum of "Captain" Skipwith, Exalted Cyclops of the Morehouse Parish Klan. On January 28, 1923, three days after the hearing closed, a New Orleans newspaper quoted Skipwith as saying:

"I have given my promise to Attorney General Coco as a Southern gentleman that I would do all that I could to keep down any trouble in Morehouse Parish until the grand jury is convened. . . . I thought this would be sufficient, but there have been signs that some persons thought I was joking and I believe it may be necessary for me to repeat that so far as I am concerned, I do not want any monkey business."<sup>38</sup>

At the time, some persons may have questioned Skipwith's claim to the title "Southern gentleman." At any rate, the "Captain" had given the word and apparently it had had some effect unless a letter

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., January 28, 1923.

received by Mayor Dade of Mer Rouge in which he was informed that he should leave Mer Rouge within ten days or "become a corpse" could be considered as "monkey business." However, this threatening letter was postmarked on January 28, 1923, and it is reasonable to assume that the letter was written before the "Captain's" no "monkey business" decree was made public.<sup>39</sup>

J. T. Dalton, Clerk of Court of the Sixth District Court in Bastrop, acting as ex officio chairman of the Morehouse Parish Jury Commission, along with five other citizens and taxpayers of Morehouse Parish, selected twenty citizens of whom twelve would be chosen for grand jury duty. Soon after the names of the twenty prospective jurors were announced, Attorney General Coco stated, "I have been told . . . that of the twenty men selected for the grand jury venire in Morehouse Parish, five of them are acknowledged klanmen, ten of them are suspected of having been affiliated with the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, while five are said to be anti-klan in sentiment."<sup>40</sup>

In the days following the selection of the prospective jurors, there was some speculation as to whether or not Klansmen would be permitted to sit on the grand jury. The justification for their being disqualified was that persons affiliated with the Klan were prejudiced against certain races and creeds.<sup>41</sup> Attorney General Coco, after confirming the rumor that Klansmen were among the

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., January 31, 1923.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1923.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., February 14, 1923.

prospective jurors, pointed out that "it is impossible under the law to exclude citizens [from jury duty] because of their affiliation with the klan or their opposition to the order and the Commission pursued the only course open: That is, select the jurors with reference purely to their personal qualifications."<sup>42</sup>

On March 5, 1923, the twelve men selected to serve on the Morehouse Parish grand jury were named. J. E. Evans of Oak Ridge was appointed foreman and the remaining members were: C. E. Tallman, S. H. Stevenson, G. A. Allen, D. E. Williams, J. H. Jordan, George Hayden, E. M. White, R. E. Bramlett, F. M. George, Frank Hope, and B. V. Hood. In the selection of the twelve jurors no area of the parish was given preference as two jurors were chosen from each of six Morehouse communities including both Mer Rouge and Bastrop.<sup>43</sup> Following the final selection of the jury members, Judge Eden instructed the group in the following statement:

"In all your deliberations you must remember that aside from family ties your first and highest duty is to your country. You cannot permit any tie, oath, or obligation to come between you and your duty to your state.

As grand jurors you have registered a most solemn oath that you will do your duty as such. You are bound, not only by your ties of loyalty to your state as good, patriotic American citizens, but also by your oath as officers to support and enforce the law. The law expects and requires that of you.

The violations of the law to which I have called your special attention have been laid to the door of the Ku Klux Klan. Whether that organization is responsible for those outrages or not does not concern you in the slightest. You are not here to unmask klansmen or to

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., February 24, 1923.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., March 6, 1923.



disrupt the Ku Klux as an organization. You are to present and indict criminals. You are to deal with men, not organizations, societies, religions, or fraternities."<sup>44</sup>

Upon the completion of Judge Odom's charge, the grand jury retired in order to organize. The group then adjourned until the following day at which time the investigation was begun.

"Captain" S. K. Skipwith, who had been present and had occupied one of the front seats during the proceedings, commented, "A very good charge."<sup>45</sup> It seemed there was finally something on which the Exalted Cyclops and the attorney general could agree as Judge Coco evaluated Judge Odom's remarks by stating, "The charge of Judge Odom to the grand jury was one of the finest such documents I have ever heard. . . . It was a great plea for law and order and orderly processes. The charge was broad, fair, yet fully, and in a masterly manner, described conditions in Morehouse Parish as they have never been pictured before. I am pleased with the Court's position."<sup>46</sup>

Although Judge Odom's statement impressed the attorney general, it did not have the desired effect upon its intended recipients. Ten days later, March 15, 1923, after examining the prepared report of the hearing presented by the attorney general's office and recalling many witnesses, the jury foreman submitted a report which included a recommendation for the construction of a new jail and the repair of

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

the Courthouse roof. The report continued:

"As to the deplorable crime of August 24, 1922, when five men were kidnapped on the highway of Lorchouse Parish, we have carefully considered all the evidence brought before this grand jury as to the activities of masked and hooded men. . . . The majority of this body are of the opinion that the evidence provided was not sufficient to warrant the finding of true bills against any particular party."<sup>47</sup>

Upon presentation of the grand jury's report, "Captain" Skipwith remarked, "It is needless to say that I am highly elated. . . . the state has done its duty and I hope it is satisfied and will let the matter rest."<sup>48</sup> After examining the remarks of the Exalted Cyclops that he was "highly elated," one is left to wonder if his elation were derived from the recommendation for Courthouse repairs. Is it possible that a citizen could derive satisfaction from a grand jury's failure to secure adequate evidence to indict persons accused of the "deplorable crime"? Walmsley, the Assistant Attorney General, was not elated when informed of the action taken by the grand jury nor did it seem to him that the matter should rest: "I am very much surprised at the news. . . . The state had counted on indictments at least for the lesser offenses, but to learn that none at all were returned in the face of the mass of evidence is amazing to me."<sup>49</sup> Among those who were not surprised at the decision of the grand jury was Mrs. T. F. Richards who had remarked two days earlier that, although she did not

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., March 16, 1923.

want vengeance, "I do want to see the murderers of my husband and Matt Daniel brought to justice. I am afraid, though, this will never be."<sup>50</sup> Another who undoubtedly received the report of the grand jury with no surprise was "Captain" Skipwith who, upon examining the names on the grand jury list, stated, "This is the last you will hear of it. There will be no indictments."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., March 14, 1923.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., March 17, 1923.

## CHAPTER V

### EFFECT OF THE MOREHOUSE MURDERS ON THE TWENTIETH CENTURY KU KLUX KLAN

The murders of Watt Daniel and T. P. Richards were never officially connected with the Ku Klux Klan; in fact, the persons responsible for the death of the two men were never found. Before the bodies of the men were found, rumors attributed to Klan origin were circulated that the men were not dead but had left the country. Even after the bodies were located there were some who believed that they were not those of Daniel and Richards, but had been brought in by the state investigators to injure the Klan.

"Captain" Skipwith, the Morehouse Klan leader, on several occasions stated that the Klan was in no way connected with the disappearance of the two men. Then, on December 28, 1922, shortly after the discovery of Richards' and Daniel's bodies in Lake Lafourche, Edward Young Clarke, Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, made this statement with regard to the Mer Rouge murders: "We have found after careful investigation that the Klan is not responsible for the murders that were supposed to have been committed in Mer Rouge, Louisiana."<sup>1</sup> The leader of the Klan in the United States also stated that he had received information to the effect that in the Morehouse area

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<sup>1</sup>The Times-Picayune, December 29, 1922.

another organization existed which used regalia similar to that of the Klan. Clarke not only denied any Klan connection with the incident but also remarked, "It is just one of several other crimes that have been charged to us by our enemies."<sup>2</sup> Z. A. Harris, national organizer for the Ku Klux Klan, repeated Clarke's sentiments in a speech delivered to approximately four thousand persons in Wichita, Kansas, on February 4, 1923. Harris told the gathering that charges that the Ku Klux Klan was responsible for the Morehouse atrocity were false and "Governor Parker knows they are not true." Harris referred to the open hearing conducted by Attorney General Clegg as "the greatest conspiracy" against the Klan.<sup>3</sup>

Although the leaders of the Ku Klux Klan emphatically denied any responsibility for the Morehouse outrages, the American public drew its own conclusions. Many citizens began to realize the inherent evil in an organization which took the law into its own hands and issued punishment as it saw fit. The Morehouse incident in the summer of 1922 was only one of many such incidents which finally resulted in the destruction of the twentieth century Ku Klux Klan. The effect of the Morehouse murders on the Klan movement was naturally more intense in the immediate area, but repercussions were felt throughout the United States.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., February 5, 1923.

Mer Rouge Klan

The village of Mer Rouge, the home of the mob victims, was never a strong Klan area, although the local Klan prior to August, 1922, consisted of approximately seventy-five members. Opposition to the Klan in Mer Rouge began well before the August 24 kidnapping and the subsequent open hearing conducted by the state of Louisiana. This opposition was strengthened by the fact that approximately twenty-five citizens of Mer Rouge had witnessed the August, 1922, kidnapping of five Mer Rouge residents who were members of prominent local families. Kelly Harp, a former member of the Morehouse Klan, described the effect of the murders upon the Mer Rouge chapter by remarking, "In our company in Mer Rouge they [the Ku Klux Klan] had approximately seventy-five members. After the murders . . . ninety-five per cent of them [the Mer Rouge members] dropped out."<sup>4</sup> Another citizen of Mer Rouge, E. M. White, explained that Mer Rouge was for the most part indifferent toward the Klan prior to the death of Richards and Daniel. White, who was never a member of the Klan, stated that the local Klan chapter was destroyed by information revealed in the open hearing and, even though the organization continued in Morehouse Parish, its activities were curtailed. During the interval between the open hearing and the disbandment of the Morehouse Klan, there were no acts of violence such as those which had characterized the previous year.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Kelly Harp in a personal interview, June 28, 1960.

<sup>5</sup>E. M. White in a personal interview, June 25, 1960.

There can be little doubt as to the effect of Richards' and Daniel's deaths on the Mer Rouge community. If there were any who continued to support the program and activities of the Ku Klux Klan, they never openly espoused their sentiments.

#### Morehouse Parish Klan

Rastrop, Louisiana, the parish seat of Morehouse, was a strong Klan community. As early as September 30, 1921, The Morehouse Enterprise, a weekly published in Rastrop, contained an editorial which stated, "This country does not desire people who can not conscientiously subscribe to the doctrine of '100 per cent Americanism.' . . . The man who lives up to this doctrine will have nothing to fear from any true American. The man who does not live up to it is the enemy of every true American. There is no middle course."<sup>6</sup> As Klan activity increased in the parish, the Enterprise on several occasions pointed out the good work of the organization. A newspaper article entitled "Ku Klux Klan Again to the Front" gave an account of Klansmen presenting a twenty-five dollar donation to a local minister.<sup>7</sup>

The Enterprise did not limit its remarks to activities of a philanthropic nature. On March 3, 1922, a front-page story described the kidnapping of Clay Osborn, a resident of Rastrop. The story explained that on Thursday afternoon at 2:30, Osborn was taken by four black-robed and hooded men into a closed automobile, driven to the

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<sup>6</sup>The Morehouse Enterprise (Rastrop), September 30, 1921.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., April 7, 1922.

outskirts of town, beaten, and returned thirty minutes later. The newspaper pointed out that Osborn was kidnapped at the northeast corner of the parish Courthouse and upon his return was unloaded on the street which fronted the Courthouse. No mention was made of the fact that a citizen of the community had been kidnapped and later returned at the seat of justice for the parish. The newspaper's comments were, "It is reported that Osborn has been a frequent figure in the courts in the past and that his reputation has not been of the best." The Enterprise remarked that "specific personal warning had been served on Osborn." Thus the reader is left with the impression that the newspaper condoned the action of the hooded mob. It is interesting to note that on the same day the editor of the Enterprise announced that there were no dissenting votes in a recent bond issue election to provide forty-five thousand dollars for city improvements. This, according to the editor of the Enterprise, proved that "the people of Bastrop stand for Progress."<sup>8</sup>

This strong pro-Klan sentiment expressed in the Enterprise is a fair evaluation of the attitude of a great number of persons in Bastrop. But there can be little doubt that as evidence was revealed in the open hearing, many persons disassociated themselves with the Klan. The strong anti-Klan New Orleans Times-Picayune on several occasions ran articles which announced that Bastrop Klansmen were resigning in large numbers. These charges were answered by "Captain" Skipwith who denied that members of the Bastrop chapter had resigned.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., March 3, 1922.



Both the Times-Picayune and "Captain" Skipwith were probably correct as they differed in their definition of the term "resignation." The New Orleans newspaper undoubtedly used "resignation" to imply that a person had disassociated himself with the organization, whereas Skipwith no doubt considered "resignation" as a more formal action. Nevertheless, it is impossible to determine the exact extent of the resignations from the Bastrop chapter.

The extent to which membership rolls decreased is not the prime concern of this writer. Interest is instead centered on the fact that the Bastrop Klan immediately ceased to function to the degree that it had for the past year, and soon it ceased to function at all. The inactivity of the Morehouse Klan was expressed by Skipwith who on January 21, 1923, during the open hearing, made a statement to the effect that the local Klan had not met for two months.<sup>9</sup> For a period of several months following the August 24 crime, there were no examples of mob action such as those which had characterized the area for the preceding year. Shortly after the close of the open hearing in Bastrop, The Times-Picayune presented a fairly accurate prediction of the final disbandment of the Morehouse chapter of the Ku Klux Klan in the following remark:

"It is predicted that there will be a demand for a new Cyclops and it is also freely predicted that there won't be a man in Morehouse Parish willing to accept the responsibility.

Without Skipwith there can be no Klan in Morehouse Parish. . . . the only solution of the problem, it is

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<sup>9</sup>The Times-Picayune, January 22, 1923.

Believed, will be the dissolution of the Morehouse Klan chapter all together."<sup>10</sup>

As well as this writer has been able to determine, the last meeting of the Morehouse Ku Klux Klan occurred in the early fall of 1923, approximately eight months following the open hearing. The purpose of the meeting was to announce Klan opposition to Judge Fred Odom (presiding judge in the open hearing) in an approaching judicial election. The meeting was held approximately seven miles from Bastrop on the Bastrop-Monroe Road. After calling the meeting to order, "Captain" Skipwith announced that the Klan intended to oppose Judge Odom in the approaching election. As soon as the announcement was made, three members of the organization rose to voice opposition to this stand. The three men made reference to the fact that in the past certain acts had been committed without their approval or support. Skipwith apparently considered this a personal attack and offered his resignation as Exalted Cyclops. When the offer was made, one member rose and said, "I move that we accept the Captain's resignation." Another rose and seconded the motion. Skipwith did not call for a vote but stepped from his speaking position and walked out of the meeting.<sup>11</sup> With this action, The Times-Picayune's prediction proved correct--"without Skipwith there can be no Klan in Morehouse Parish"--as this is the last mention which the writer was able to locate of the Ku Klux Klan in Morehouse Parish.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., January 28, 1923.

<sup>11</sup>Judge Fred Odom in a personal interview, June 29, 1960.

### Louisiana Klan Movement

The effect of the Morehouse murders on the Louisiana Ku Klux Klan was extensive and perhaps the most important single incident which led to the ultimate decline of the organization in this state. However, it is not a simple matter to define with exactness the immediate effect. The difficulty is due to two factors: (1) The fact that the southern portion of Louisiana is predominantly Roman Catholic and, as such, had always been hostile to the Klan and (2) The difficulty of determining the fine line which separated hostility to the Klan due to rejection of Klan methods and the attempt to use the growing anti-Klan "bandwagon" for political purposes.

During the months of March and April, 1923, a New Orleans Times-Picayune reporter, W. B. Robinson, traveled throughout much of South Louisiana gathering reports for his newspaper. He dealt principally with the sentiment of various communities toward the Ku Klux Klan and the opinion of local leaders as to the effect that the Klan would have on state politics in the future. From such cities as Lake Charles, Crowley, Napoleonville, Opelousas, Ville Platte, Bogaloussa, Lafayette, and St. Francisville, Robinson made two major observations: (1) The Klan was definitely losing strength in the areas visited and (2) The Ku Klux Klan would be one of the most important, if not the most important, issues in the coming state elections. Robinson's report from St. Francisville, which is similar to other reports, points out the reason for the increased attention shown the Klan: "The Ku Klux Klan is in a groggy condition in this Parish [West Feliciana],

according to citizens in a position to know. The local Klan has lost strength, it is said, and dwindled down to a small number of members. Several quit because they saw evil in the mask. Others dropped out after the Morehouse revelations."<sup>12</sup> On another occasion, Robinson quoted T. J. Labbe, former state senator from St. Martin Parish, as saying, "We are against the mask in this parish, we don't need any organization of that type in Louisiana. Morehouse Parish has given the state a sample of masked government."<sup>13</sup>

Reaction to the Klan in South Louisiana can also be found in the editorials of various newspapers. On December 23, 1922, the day following the discovery of Richards' and Daniel's bodies, the States Times of Baton Rouge expressed the idea that "the Morehouse murders, that now stand out in ghostly horror before the people of the state, will mean the end of the Ku Klux Klan in Louisiana."<sup>14</sup> This marked a change in editorial opinion as the paper had opposed Parker's controversial trip to Washington in an editorial written exactly one month earlier. The True Democrat, published in St. Francisville, attacked the Klan through its editorial space by pointing out the bad publicity Louisiana was receiving as a result of the Morehouse incident. It also emphasized that the state would have to acknowledge what was wrong and "clean house." The editor pointed out that the Klan mask must be removed and expressed the opinion that had it not been for

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<sup>12</sup>The Times-Picayune, April 20, 1923.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., March 19, 1923.

<sup>14</sup>The States Times (Baton Rouge), December 23, 1922.

masks in Morehouse the two men would still be alive.<sup>15</sup>

These examples characterize the sentiments expressed in most of the South Louisiana newspapers. Newspapers, however, were not the only agents which condemned conditions in Morehouse Parish. In the latter part of January, 1923, Dr. G. H. Crutcher, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, spoke to what some described as perhaps the largest crowd ever assembled in the church on "Some Lessons From The Mer Rouge Tragedies." Dr. Crutcher began by saying that if there were any who expected a defense of the Ku Klux Klan and its activities, they would be disappointed. He further stated, "Two of the men who are accused of murder in Morehouse Parish are Baptist deacons. If these men are innocent of the crime they will come free. And if they are guilty they ought to suffer."<sup>16</sup>

The effect of the Mer Rouge murders on South Louisiana was obvious but, as has been mentioned previously, a great deal of anti-Klan sentiment was already evident in this predominantly Roman Catholic section of the state. This was not the case in North Louisiana in which any deterioration in the Klan movement may be more accurately attributed to reaction to the Morehouse incident.

Prior to the Morehouse open hearing, most of the North Louisiana newspapers were either pro-Klan in sentiment or very passive in their treatment of the organization. Most of the newspapers of this area restricted their coverage of Klan activity to accounts of Klan

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<sup>15</sup>The True Democrat (St. Francisville), February 10, 1923.

<sup>16</sup>The States Times, January 22, 1923.

generosity to religious organizations or similar groups. There were some newspapers, however, so pro-Klan in sentiment as to give the impression of being official Klan publications. The best example of this type is The Winnfield News-American, published in Winnfield and managed and edited by N. C. Dalton. In an editorial printed on July 28, 1922, Dalton explained his purpose in starting the newspaper and associated himself with Klan ideals by remarking:

"I am a country boy and have just started in the paper business. [I] Am one hundred per cent American and can prove it by two honorable discharges from the United States Army. . . . If the Americans want to kiss the foot of a Dago Pope while he sits in the White House of the United States of Catholics of America kill the Ku Klux Klan. If you are American and want to keep your free public schools, your bibles, and white supremacy then join the Ku Klux Klan if you are eligible."<sup>17</sup>

On page four of the same issue appeared an article entitled "How to Join The Klan" in which the method of gaining Klan membership was revealed. If this article were a Klan advertisement no mention was made of the fact.

Following the beginning of the open hearing in early January, Dalton's newspaper continued to express strong Klan sympathy. The newspaper virtually condoned the death of the two men and described the action of the mob as "the best they knew how to do. . . . It was either to surrender to the cutthroats and lawless element or take strenuous steps to clean house. . . . As to the disappearance of the two members of the five men captured and their reported death, it is

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<sup>17</sup>The Winnfield News-American (Winnfield), July 28, 1922.

indeed unfortunate if human life had to be lost in the affair."<sup>18</sup>

This article was written at the beginning of the open hearing but by the end of January, 1923, The Winnfield News-American had reduced the amount of space devoted to Klan news, although it never expressed anti-Klan sentiment.

The examination of another local North Louisiana newspaper reveals perhaps more accurately the change which occurred. The Caldwell Watchman, published in Northcentral Louisiana, provides an excellent example of a newspaper which was sympathetic if not actually pro-Klan prior to the Morehouse incident but which changed its ideas following the hearing in Bastrop. In the early part of 1922, The Watchman, following the lead of many other locals, published stories of the good deeds of the Klan. On September 1, 1922, The Watchman announced the establishment of Dalton's newspaper at Winnfield, and after observing that the weekly favored the Klan, remarked, "Here's our best wishes."<sup>19</sup> Following the Bastrop hearing, The Watchman gradually developed a different attitude. Not only did the newspaper reprint very strong anti-Klan editorials from South Louisiana papers, but it injected notices of disbandment from local Louisiana chapters. Following a brief editorial fight with Dalton's newspaper, The Watchman ridiculed the Klan in a very sarcastic article printed on February 2, 1923, in which the writer expressed concern for the children of the country, "Is there not grave danger that with the passing of this Klan-imbued

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<sup>18</sup>The Times-Picayune, January 8, 1923.

<sup>19</sup>The Caldwell Watchman (Columbia), September 1, 1922.

generation, American manhood may slip back into old ideas of courage, fair play and a square deal for every one." In order to prevent this, the article advised that "Klanboys will receive thorough instructions in the fire-building, tar-boiling, stake driving, flogging, whipping, the hue-and-cry, and other healthful, out-of-door sports."<sup>20</sup>

One other example of newspaper reaction in North Louisiana is found in the change in attitude of The Richland Beacon. This Rayville newspaper is important not only because Richland Parish was considered a strong Klan area but also because Rayville is located approximately ten miles from Lake Lafourche, the lake in which the bodies were found. On January 2, 1923, The Times-Picayune reprinted an article from The Beacon entitled "Where We Stand." The Rayville newspaper very clearly stated its position:

"We deny the right of any man or any number of men of any organization, of any church, of any state to put a padlock on our lips, to make the tongue a convict. If we are correctly informed, the Ku Klux Klan is not in full sympathy with this sentiment; hence our opposition to those principles, or rather practices, for which we understand they stand.

We do not wish to do anyone an injury, but we condemn the Morehouse Parish crime and we will not excuse the criminal acts of alleged members hiding behind the mask and the cloak of the order."<sup>21</sup>

Another example of anti-Klan sentiment in North Louisiana is found in the formation of "The Caucasian-American League" in October, 1923, in Madison Parish. According to A. B. Parker, a charter member of this organization, "The primary purpose of the league is to combat

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., February 2, 1923.

<sup>21</sup>The Times-Picayune, January 2, 1923.



repudiated."<sup>24</sup> The Franklinton newspaper also printed an article taken from The Hammond Vindicator which stated: "The position of Governor Parker in regard to the Klan, is the real surprise of his friends. . . . the very element instrumental in his election."<sup>25</sup> From these editorials it is evident that the Ku Klux Klan was destined to play a part in state politics. It is not the writer's wish to consider how the issue was used or the extent of its use, but rather to show that the Morehouse incident served to hasten the division between the pro-Klan and anti-Klan elements.

Governor Parker's controversial Washington trip and The Washington Post story mentioned in Chapter III indicated the possibility of the way in which the incident could be used politically. After the two bodies were found, the political potential of the incident increased. The February 18, 1923, issue of The Times-Picayune printed a portion of a letter written by Governor Parker to State Representative L. B. Baynard, Jr., in reply to Representative Baynard's open letter to the governor. Baynard attacked Parker for ignoring what Baynard considered to be the will of the majority of the voters by Parker's refusal to consider the appointment of Klan members to state positions. In his reply, Parker clearly stated his position with regard to Klan members in the state government: "I am doing what I sincerely believe best for the interest of the entire state, and now wish to write you very frankly that as long as I am governor I do not

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<sup>24</sup>The Era-Leader (Franklinton), April 17, 1922.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

intend to appoint to any office of any kind any man without having his assurance that he is not a member of the Ku Klux Klan."<sup>26</sup> The following month Parker explained his refusal to consider for a judicial position two persons who were reportedly Klan members: "A lawyer knows the majesty of the law, and a judge on the bench must enforce the law. I will certainly not name a man who has taken the Klan oath to judge to enforce the law of the State."<sup>27</sup> From several areas of the state came evidence that the Klan issue had become a part of Louisiana politics. Less than one week following the open hearing in Bastrop there appeared a questionnaire in The Progress, a weekly published in De Quincy, which asked candidates in Calcasieu Parish to define their position with respect to the Klan issue.<sup>28</sup>

The first test of pro-Klan and anti-Klan strength in a state election came in March, 1923, in the Democratic Primary for Associate Justice of the Fifth Supreme Court District. Of the three candidates in the election, Robert S. Ellis and Columbus Reid were considered pro-Klan, and H. F. Brunot, anti-Klan. Newspapers from the Fifth Supreme Court District expressed the opinion that the major issue of the election was the Ku Klux Klan. On March 24, 1923, The True Democrat of St. Francisville expressed editorially the idea that the "outstanding issue in this campaign is that of the Ku Klux Klan."<sup>29</sup> From

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<sup>26</sup>The Times-Picayune, January 18, 1923.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., March 15, 1923.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., January 28, 1923.

<sup>29</sup>The True Democrat, March 24, 1923.

The St. Helena Echo, a pro-Klan newspaper published in Greensburg, came the comment that "the only issue in this election was the Ku Klux Klan."<sup>30</sup> The election results named Brunot, the anti-Klan candidate, as victor in the first primary. A careful examination of the election returns reveals that the Fifth Supreme Court District election was divided between the Protestant "Florida" parishes and the predominantly Roman Catholic parishes. Perhaps Brunot might have won without the aid of the growing anti-Klan feeling, but there can be little doubt that his victory at the polls in the first primary was in part due to increased attention brought to the Ku Klux Klan as a result of the Morehouse incident.

On November 29, 1923, in a public speech in New Orleans, Governor Parker revealed the extent to which the Ku Klux Klan had become a part of state politics and the part played by the Morehouse incident in thrusting the Ku Klux Klan into the political arena:

"I am here tonight to render a brief account of my stewardship and, as far as may lie in my power, to brush aside false issues and present the true issue in the present campaign--the Ku Klux Klan. . . . Don't let them deceive you as to the real issues in this campaign in our state, your great issue is Klan and anti-Klan; whether we desire to work as a law-abiding, God-fearing people under our laws, or whether we are willing to permit an organization to supersede our laws--an Invisible government take control of the state and then if possible of the Nation, and if we of Louisiana are spineless enough to permit a condition of this kind, then we need no lawyers, no district attorneys, no courts and no temples of Justice. . . . You are familiar with the outrages of Mer Rouge. So long as the present generation lives the horrible deaths of Daniel, the gallant

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<sup>30</sup>The St. Helena Echo (Greensburg), April 6, 1923.

soldier, and Richards, the mechanic, denied even the dog's right of defense, will cause a shudder. You have read what followed. How the effort of the State was balked at every turn by the Klan when the attempt was made to bring the perpetrators of the outrage to justice. . . . But the horrors of Mer Rouge shook the state to its foundation. . . . The people of this state should vote for no man who does not unqualifiedly declare against the Ku Klux Klan and further pledge himself not to knowingly appoint any Klansman to office."<sup>31</sup>

### National Klan Movement

Due to the extensive coverage of the Bastrop open hearing, the entire nation was confronted with the situation in Morehouse Parish, which therefore directly affected the attitude of persons throughout the United States toward the Ku Klux Klan. The reaction outside of Louisiana took three distinct forms: (1) Support of Governor Parker's strong anti-Klan stand; (2) Action taken by other areas to stamp out the Klan in their locales; and (3) Withdrawal of individuals from the Klan.

During and immediately following the open hearing, Governor Parker received letters and telegrams from various sources commending him on his vigorous fight against the Klan. "If such outrages as the Bastrop murders are unchecked they will lead to guerilla warfare throughout the country."<sup>32</sup> Thus did Governor William Cameron Sproul of Pennsylvania evaluate the Morehouse situation. Governor Sproul continued, "Governor Parker's stand and the firm attitude of the state

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<sup>31</sup>The Times-Picayune, October 30, 1923.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., February 17, 1923.

government of Louisiana not only has attracted attention throughout the United States but it has, I believe, seriously hampered the activities of similar organizations in other sections."<sup>33</sup>

An example of newspaper reaction is found in the following editorial from The New York World:

"Governor Parker of Louisiana has performed a brave service to the American people in refusing to let the Mer Rouge murders be forgotten. He had every temptation to allow the kidnapping and murders of last August by masked white-robed men to remain an insoluble mystery.

Instead he faced out the invisible empire and moved the wheels of American Justice against the perpetrators of mob vengeance. The majesty of the law stands higher in Louisiana today because of John Parker's courage. In Louisiana today, because an untterrified man is in office, the American system of government prevails. A secret criminal conspiracy against the state has been caught in the grip of the law.

The Mer Rouge murders are the logical outcome of the attempt to set up an invisible empire. John Parker's pursuit of these crimes is the logical outcome of the determination to maintain the visible republic."<sup>34</sup>

A third and perhaps more important example of reaction to Parker's stand is revealed in the passage of a resolution by the Texas Senate which commended Governor Parker's efforts at law enforcement and expressed approval of his action against "hooded mob and masked political organizations."<sup>35</sup>

In the early months of 1923, anti-Klan sentiment was evident in several areas of the United States. This resulted from the increased attention shown the Ku Klux Klan because of incidents such as the one

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., December 28, 1922.

<sup>35</sup>The Shreveport Journal, January 16, 1923.

in Morehouse Parish. On January 15, 1923, Texas State Legislators announced that a study of the Ku Klux Klan and hooded bands operating in Texas would be one of the first duties of the legislature.<sup>36</sup> In January, 1923, the Chicago City Council passed a resolution by a vote of fifty-six to two by which any Klan member would be removed from the city payroll.<sup>37</sup> On April 5, 1923, the Minnesota Senate unanimously passed the "Cain Anti-Masking Bill" which was designed to destroy the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the above actions taken by public officials, there were examples of community organizations designed to hinder the growth of the Klan. Greenville, Mississippi, located approximately eighty miles from Morehouse Parish, witnessed the creation of a group known as "The Protestant Organization Opposed to the Ku Klux Klan."<sup>39</sup> The "Good Government Club" of Eastland, Texas, adopted a resolution which strongly condemned the Klan and which explained that the action taken came as a result of the Morehouse outrages.<sup>40</sup>

The Reverend Thomas Dixon, author of The Clansmen, which served as the basis of the motion picture "The Birth of a Nation," declined to engage in a public debate on the Klan and remarked:

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<sup>36</sup>The States Times, January 15, 1923.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., January 18, 1923.

<sup>38</sup>The Times-Picayune, April 6, 1923.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., March 17, 1923.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., January 14, 1923.

"I have no desire to cultivate a closer acquaintance with the principles and aims of the modern Ku Klux Klan. The use you make of the old Klan disguise is enough for me. If these disguises had not been circulated in Morehouse Parish, Louisiana, those two young men would never have disappeared. The modern Ku Klux Klan is responsible for these murders, no matter who committed the acts."<sup>41</sup>

A good example of the reaction of some Klan members outside of Louisiana is found in the action of Edgar Irvin Fuller, former Klingle of the Ku Klux Klan in Northern California. Shortly after the open hearing, Fuller authored a volume entitled The Ku Klux Klan Pubble, and justified the publication by remarking, "It was the brutal murders in Louisiana that were directly responsible for my determination to give the public the real story of the Klan, to tell what the organization really is and what it stands for, who is behind it and why."<sup>42</sup>

A statement which the writer believes to be a fair evaluation of the effect of the Morehouse incident on the twentieth century Ku Klux Klan is taken from an editorial of The Philadelphia Public Ledger:

"The affair at Mer Rouge is a warning to the country and the Ku Klux Klan. Men who have any reason in them will understand that this thing which had become inevitable in Morehouse parish is inevitable any and everywhere that masked men become a law unto themselves. Guilty or not guilty, it will get the blame for similar terrorism, outrages and secret feats in other communities. . . . It was this that destroyed the old Ku Klux, which had some shadow of excuse for existence."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., February 7, 1923.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., April 15, 1923.

<sup>43</sup>The States Times, December 30, 1922.

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## APPENDIX

The official report of the postmortem examinations upon the bodies identified as Watt Daniel and Thomas Fletcher Richards of Mer Rouge, Morehouse parish, Louisiana:

"Autopsies held in Mer Rouge on December 22, 1922, and performed conjointly by Drs. Charles W. Duval and John A. Lanford, authorized by the attorney general of the state of Louisiana and witnessed by the following persons: Judge A. V. Coco, Sumner Walsley, the official undertaker, Mr. Mulhern and his assistant, Mr. Fontana, assistant to the pathologist and several guardsmen.

"Case No. 1--F. Watt Daniel is removed from the burial box by the undertaker to an improvised table for the purpose of conducting the postmortem examination. The body is completely wrapped in a dripping wet white sheet and a woolen blanket, which coverings are removed by the prosecutors immediately preceding the autopsy. The odor of embalming fluid is pronounced.

"Inspection--The body is that of a well-developed and nourished white man without head, feet and hands. It is partly clothed with the remains of a soft collared white shirt and blue serge (woolen) trousers and underwear of white cotton material. About the hips and arranged like a diaper is a suspension basket made of four heavy galvanized wires. The wires composing the basket are angulated in front. There is a black leather belt with a plain sterling silver buckle holding the trousers in their natural position around the waist. About the neck in the correct position is a black colored neckwear tied in the form of a bow. On the neck band of the shirt, posteriorly, are red embroidered letters--"F. W. D."--which are handsewed to the collar band.

"On removing the belt from the usual straps on the trousers it is found that the latters are closed and intact around the waist, hips and upper part of the thighs. The trousers are removed by cutting with scissors and the several pockets examined. In the watch pocket is found a wrist watch, with leather strap attached to one side. The crystal is crushed and the hands indicate 10 o'clock. On the back of the watch is engraved "J. L. Daniel, Mer Rouge, La." There also is found in the watch pocket a flattened pad of United States paper money, the outer bill showing a five-dollar denomination. The two ordinary side pockets of the trousers are empty. The left hip pocket contains an unmarked white handkerchief. The trousers have no right hip pocket. There are no special markings on the white underwear.

"It is noted that some of the bones of the extremities, particularly the upper, are protruding, through the fragments of the clothes and the flesh.

"The flesh, including the skin, while in an advanced state of decomposition, is intact and the nature and relation of component parts are readily differentiated. In general the skin covering the body does not peel off in layers and is more or less dry and encrusted. Their latter condition in part is the result of dehydrating substance previously used by the undertaker. This substance resembles sawdust, which has been impregnated with chemicals and deodorants. On scraping

off this material, the skin is of a leathery consistence, showing a condition of adipocere and is firmly attached to the underlying structures.

"On removing the clothes there is noted an entire absence of all the external genitalia. Closer inspection shows that these organs were removed with some sharp cutting instrument, as evidenced by the relatively smooth remaining skin edges of the area and the inner sides of the thighs and perineum.

"The skeletal muscles and tendons throughout the body are in comparatively good condition and in consequence readily recognized. Their consistency is flabby but not friable. It is noteworthy that the muscles and other soft tissues are entirely free from microscopic evidence of gas, and not filled with fluid except in the deeper parts, particularly those of the thighs, buttocks and shoulders; however, in these situations, it is only moderately in excess. One of the striking features is the paleness of the muscles, indicating scarcity of the blood within the vessels, except in certain areas adjacent to bone injuries and where direct traumatism has occurred. These areas are noticable in the soft tissues of the arms, forearms, thighs, legs, chest wall and back. Particularly in the latter there is evidence of extensive hemorrhage beneath the skin and involving the subcutaneous tissues and underlying muscles, extending as high as the seventh cervical vertebrae and as low as the tenth dorsal. The blood extravasations are chiefly on the right side of the vertebral column. In all these areas the muscles and soft tissues are of a dark greenish color in contrast to the pale pinkish brown color of the exsanguinated muscles and the reddish brown color of normal muscles.

"The tendons and ligaments about the stumps of the legs and forearms are ragged and uneven as though they had been torn or pulled from their attachments.

"The viscera of the thoracic and abdominal cavities are in a marked state of decomposition and decay. Only the liver, heart, stomach, intestines and bladder are entirely recognizable. The stomach and intestines are completely collapsed and contain no gas.

"The bones of the body, particularly those of the extremities (legs and arms) are found fractured. These fractures are compound and comminuted. The striking features of the fractures of the long bones are their character, similarity and symmetry. The humerus of both arms, the radius and ulna of both arms, the femur of both thighs, and the tibia and fibula of both legs are fractured in three different places. These fractures regularly occur at the upper, middle and lower portions respectively in each instance. As a rule they are equi-distant and approximately three and one-half inches apart. The character of the fractures indicates that they were produced by a crushing force or one in which the force was applied simultaneously from more than one direction. This explains the great number of small bits and fragments of bone, varying in size and shape, which are found at the fracture sites.

"Thorax--The most of the ribs, together with the right clavicle and breast plate (sternum) are fractured and dislocated. The first eight ribs on the right side present fractures regularly at the

angles posteriorly while the first six ribs on this side present in addition fractures anteriorly and near their costal junction and the seventh rib in addition is fractured at its posterior angle. The breast plate shows that the manubrium is dislocated from its costal attachments and its union with its middle portion. These fractures posteriorly are of the greenstick variety (partially broken and partially bent) while these anteriorly are complete. The appearance and location of these fractures to the bones of the thoracic cage would indicate that the force was applied simultaneously upon the front and back of the torso.

"The vertebral column and the pelvic girdle are found intact and show neither fracture nor dislocation.

"Head--The greater portion of the skull is missing, there being present only parts of the occipital bone and a piece of the sphenoid. These were sufficient to recognize the topography of the base of the skull, as they contained the foramen magnum and its connection with the bones of the neck, which latter were in their proper relations and unbroken.

"The scalp and underlying tissues are present for several inches beyond the margin of the basal skull bones, forming loose overlying flaps. The posterior skin flap is covered with short light brown hair. No brain tissue is noted.

"Pertinent comments: The gross anatomical findings in this case, namely lacerations, amputations and hemorrhages of certain of the soft tissues in association with multiple comminuted fractures of the bony structures permit of the conclusion that some one or more of these injuries was the primary and the others the contributory cause of death.

"The character of the injuries to the soft tissues and their proximity to the injuries of the bones indicate that the lesions to the soft parts and to the bones were dependent one upon the other and produced simultaneously.

"The striking symmetry and character of the bone fractures and their relationship to the injuries of the surrounding soft tissues suggest that the body was subjected to some specially constructed device, designed for inflicting punishment.

"CHARLES W. DUVAL, M.D., "Pathologist.

"JOHN A. LANFORD, M.D., "Pathologist."

"Case No. 2--Thomas Fletcher Richards is removed from the burial box by the undertaker to the improvised table for the purpose of conducting this postmortem examination. The body is completely wrapped in a dripping wet white sheet and a woolen blanket, which coverings were removed by prosecutors immediately preceding the autopsy. The odor of embalming fluid is pronounced.

"Inspection--The body is that of a well developed and fairly well nourished white man without head, feet and hands. It is entirely nude, there being no clothes of any description found upon the body. There are two heavy galvanized wires circumferentially arranged about the hips and forming angulations anteriorly. The wires show very little rusting.

"On inspection it is noted that fragments of the long bones are protruding from the stumps of the right forearm and right leg, namely, radius and the tibia respectively. It is further noted that the upper fragment of the right femur has pierced the soft tissue and skin of the thigh. The scapulae are protruding through the overlying skin and the middle portion of the shaft of the right humerus is missing.

"The skin with the exception of that about the stumps of the extremities, the head and parts where compound fractures occur is in a fairly good state of preservation. In general, it is rough, fairly dry, encrusted and shows no tendency to peel off. The dryness of the skin is in part due to deodorants used by the undertaker. Upon closer inspection of the skin and especially after incision there is noted considerable adipocere and it is attached properly to the underlying tissue. The external genitalia are present and intact.

"The muscles over the body are in an advanced state of decomposition, however, they are without difficulty recognized. Their consistency is soft, fluidy and friable, tearing quite readily on traction. It is noteworthy that the muscles and other soft tissues are free from macroscopic evidence of gas. The color of the muscular tissues is pale pink, indicating ante-mortem drainage of the blood with the exception of those areas about the bone fractures and those where traumatism has occurred. Here the muscles of these areas are distinctly of a blue black color which is indicative of altered extravasated blood. These discolored muscle areas are most in evidence along the vertebrae column posteriorly.

"The ligaments and tendons are still intact with the exception of those about the stumps of forearms and legs where they are ragged and uneven. This appearance suggests that the tendons had been mashed or torn from their attachments.

"The internal organs of the various body cavities are in a marked state of decay. The liver, heart, stomach and intestines are in place and easily recognized. The heart, in particular, has its various structures intact and presents a flattened shape the absence of blood in the chambers of the heart tend to show that the organ was emptied just prior to or shortly after death, which is to be expected from the lacerations and presumable amputations of the several distal portions of extremities. The liver is found in the normal position and appears shriveled to about one-third its natural size. The intestines are also in their normal position as far as their attachments are concerned and are found in a collapsed condition and well down against the spinal column. There is no evidence of gas in these or any of the other soft structures of these regions.

"Bones--Many of these structures, especially those of the extremities are found fractured. The fractures are compound and comminuted and present the striking features of similar bilateral location and symmetry.

"The femur of both thighs, and the humerus of both arms are similarly fractured in three different places. These fractures are fairly regular at the upper, middle and lower portions of each bone. With respect to the bones of the right forearm, only an upper fragment of the radius and ulna are found. These articulate properly with one

another and with the humerus. The distal portions of these fragments are ragged and irregularly broken. The bones of the left forearm present comminuted fractures at the upper and lower portions; the ulna is fractured completely at its upper end and the radius is fractured completely at its lower end.

"This peculiar difference in the character of injuries to these bones is explained by the fact that the larger end of the radius is at the lower end, while the smaller ends of these bones are in the reverse position. Furthermore, the radius articulates with the ulna at the wrist, while the ulna articulates with humerus and the radius at the elbow.

"Only small fragments of the right tibia and fibula are round. These fragments are of the upper portion and articulate properly at the knee joint. The tibia fragment contains the patella and its ligamentous attachment. The broken end is jagged and presents numerous lineal fractures that extend upward and into the articulating surface. Only a small portion of the upper side of the tibia and fibula are present. These fragments are in proper position with respect to the knee joint. The fragmented ends of these two bones present very similar appearance to those of the right leg.

"Thorax--The breast plate is for the most part separated from its costal attachments, the right fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth ribs in this situation are dislocated while the left second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh ribs are likewise separated from the costal attachments and these cartilages are also separated from their junction with the sternum. There are no breaks to other parts of the ribs which are in proper articulation with the vertebrae. The explanation of this separation of the component parts at the anterior portion of the thoracic cage without any breaks to its osseous is found in the fact of the elasticity and flexibility of the bones as compared to the weaker cartilaginous attachments. Presumably from the facts presented the force producing the injury was applied anteriorly and posteriorly to the thorax at one and the same time, the anterior force pressing and crushing the cage.

"Of the shoulder girdle, the clavicles are in position and unbroken. The right scapula shows circular fractures three to four centimeters in diameter, in both the upper fossae. The left is unbroken.

"The spinous processes of the sixth and ninth dorsal vertebrae are broken at their junction with the body of the vertebrae, but nowhere else is the spinal column found fractured or dislocated. The same is true for the bones forming the pelvic girdle.

"Head--The greater portion of the skull, the scalp and underlying tissues and all of the brain are missing. Parts of the occipital, sphenoid and temporal bones that form the base of the skull are present and while presenting numerous fragments are still in position, at least to the extent that it is easy to recognize the middle and posterior skull fossae. The portion of the occipital bone which contains the foramen magnum is intact and articulating with the first two bones of the neck viz: Atlas and axis.

"Pertinent comments: The gross anatomical findings in this

case namely lacerations, amputations and hemorrhages of certain of the soft tissues in association with multiple comminuted fractures of the bony structures permit of the conclusion that some one or more of these injuries was the primary, and the others, the contributing cause of death.

"The character of the injuries to the soft tissue and their proximity to the injuries of the bones indicate that the lesions to the soft parts and to the bones were dependent one upon the other and produced simultaneously.

"The striking symmetry and character of the bone fractures and the irrelationship to the injuries of the surrounding soft tissues suggest that the body was subjected to some specially constructed device, designed for inflicting punishment.

"CHARLES W. DUVAL, M.D., "Pathologist.

"JOHN A. LANFORD, M.D., "Pathologist."1

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<sup>1</sup>The Times-Picayune, January 7, 1923.



## VITA

Alton Earl Ingram was born in El Dorado, Arkansas, on November 19, 1934, and was educated in the public schools of Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana. In 1952, he enrolled in Northeast Louisiana State College in Monroe, Louisiana, and after one year of study, entered the United States Army. Upon completion of his military service in 1955, he re-entered Northeast Louisiana State College and received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in January, 1958. In September, 1958, he began graduate study in the Department of History at Louisiana State University and is a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in August, 1961.

## EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: INGRAM, ALTON E

Major Field: History

Title of Thesis: The Twentieth Century Ku Klux Klan in Morehouse Parish, Louisiana

Approved:

G. F. Davis  
Major Professor and Chairman

A. J. Johnson  
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Robert S. Friedman

Burl Noggle

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Date of Examination:

10 July 1961